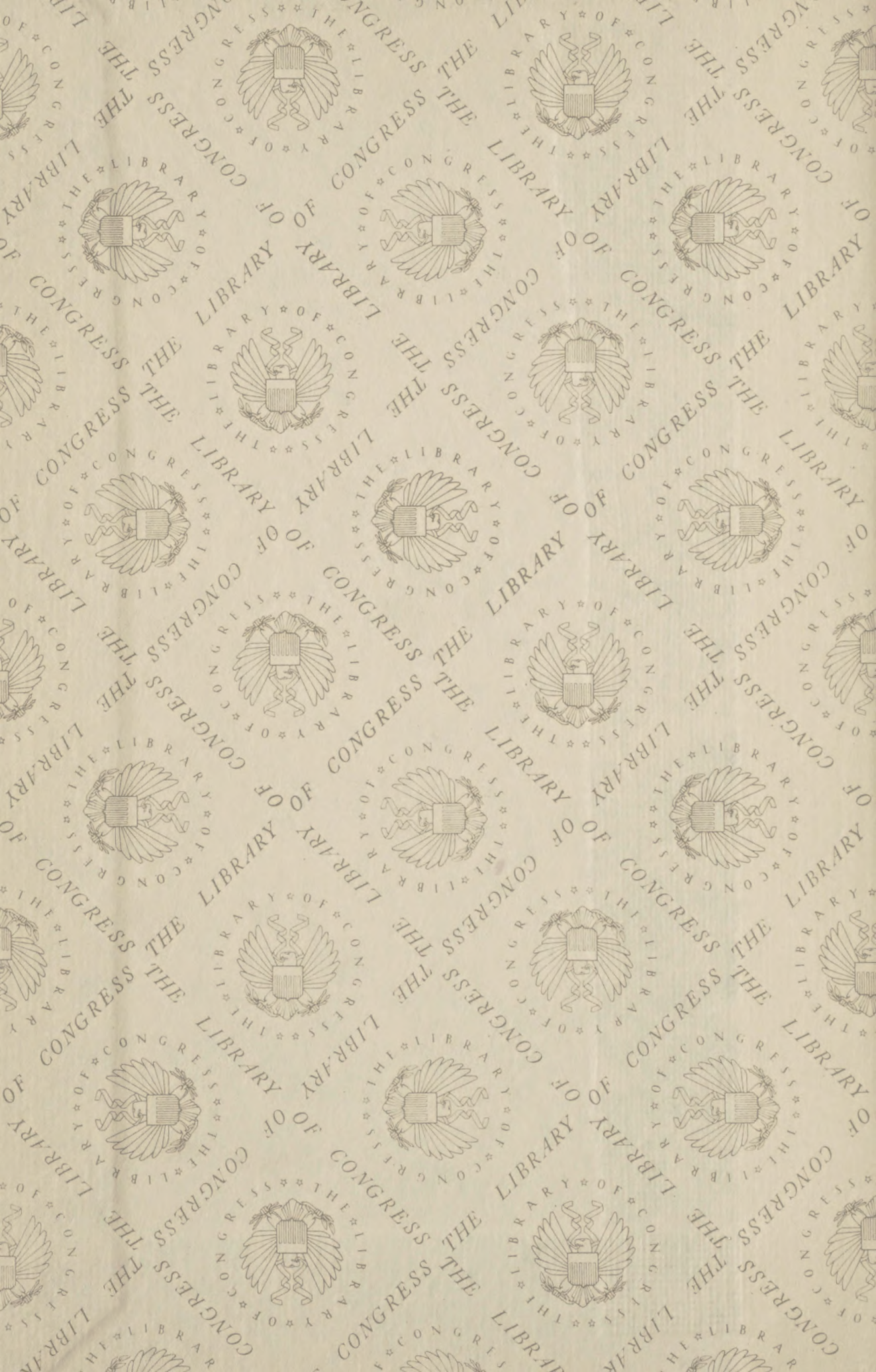








ALISON'S INTRODUCTION TO HER GRANDMOTHER.

ALISON'S ADVENTURES

OR

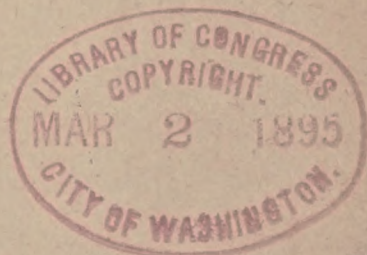
THE BRODERICK ESTATE

A STORY FOR GIRLS

BY

LUCY C. LILLIE

AUTHOR OF "A FAMILY DILEMMA," "ESTHER'S FORTUNE,"
"HELEN GLENN," "FOR HONOR'S SAKE," ETC., ETC.



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ALISON'S ADVENTURES.

CHAPTER I.

THE afternoon of a day exceptionally sultry, close, and depressing even for August in New York was slowly wearing itself away with only the hope of a possible thunder-storm at nightfall to make it at all endurable.

The old-fashioned, still exclusive neighborhood of Stuyvesant Square showed some animation only in the park itself; the houses bordering it, for the most part genteel in appearance, offering no indications as to whether their owners were in town or country. A few idlers,—nursery-maids with their charges, or mothers or elder sisters of the drudging community with theirs,—glad of the peaceful shade of the park trees, had the square in undisturbed possession. It was four o'clock, as the chime of old St. George's, breaking the lazy stillness, had just informed the neighborhood, and the occupants of the benches or strollers in the heated walks began to glance apprehensively at the leaden sky.

Not far from the western gate a young girl was seated, as she had been for an hour or more, apparently absorbed in a book open in her hands, yet frequently lifting her eyes from the printed page, gazing dreamily about with an air of preoccupation which gave a new look to her face—a peculiar force scarcely in keeping with her youth, the type which belongs to faces, it would seem,

created for a painter's model of perfect girlhood, the dawning power of the *woman* just lighting into new expression eyes, lips, every glance, the whole beautified by the sort of soul-innocence far more captivating when seen in the woman than in the naturally unconscious child. Her costume of blue and white cambric, although well worn and washed, had been evidently fashioned by a skilled *modiste*, while the plainly trimmed little hat bore the "hall-mark" of some artist's hand. Whether actually beautiful or not, few persons in their first glance at Alison Fane stopped to enquire.

Something there was about the fair oval face with its darkly fringed hazel eyes, sensitive nose, well-formed mouth, and resolute, if dimpled, little chin which attracted by force of that indefinable, mystic power which the Italians call *simpatica*, and we are obliged to define by the too often used term *personality*. Better still when, at the sight of some merry prank of a little toddler on the grass, the girl's abstraction vanished, her eyes under their dark fringes lighted, and her composed young lips relaxed into a lovely, dimpling smile; there was a look which made her face irresistible, a mingling of archness and intelligence for which the seriousness of a moment before had not prepared one, and after that there could be no question but that beauty of a really striking and, above all, interesting character the young girl in the well-worn cambric gown certainly possessed.

Her attention from her own thoughts diverted by her neighbor's little one, she closed her book, and, with a hasty, half-frowning look at the sky, started to leave the square. She had come out for quiet and reflection, but it was evident from her manner, her listless way of walking homeward, that no very satisfactory conclusions had been

reached. But, in point of fact, the position in which Alison Fane found herself admitted of very scant material to build hopefully upon. Three weeks ago her only known relative, an elderly cousin, had died after an illness which very nearly exhausted the slender capital remaining in a New York bank. The income upon which she and Alison had lived comfortably proved to have been an annuity purchased, and spent, by old Mrs. Gildersleeve without a thought of the position in which ignorance of economy alone would place Alison at her death. It was only a year ago the when fatal character of her ailment was made known that the old lady had experienced any qualms of conscience on Alison's account, but she was too innately selfish to alter in any way her mode of life even by allowing Alison to know and consider with her the probabilities of the future. Well aware that she was dying, and that the young girl who had been so long her cheerful, unselfish companion was being left painfully unequipped for the battle of life, Mrs. Gildersleeve preferred that the reality of her position should come to Alison with the shock it had rather than that her own last days be troubled by discussing troublesome matters with anyone. So it had come about that when, in the furnished rooms the two had occupied for three months, Mrs. Gildersleeve breathed her last Alison Fane had discovered that not only was she absolutely without knowledge of anyone to turn to, but almost penniless, the few hundreds remaining on Mrs. Gildersleeve's bank account being in part devoted to settling up the doctor's bill, the funeral expenses, etc., after which enough only remained to pay her way for a short time while she "looked about."

At first Alison, who, however cold the companionship between her cousin and herself might have been, was

not without a strong sense of natural affection and the value of a protector, felt too stunned or dazed to realize the dreariness of her situation. She did not even give up or change the three rooms they had occupied until her landlady, Mrs. Norton, suggested it. This alone it may have been which roused her to a consideration of what she could, might, or would do. The removal from the parlor to the top floor emphasized her change of fortunes sharply; and the first evening Alison sat alone in the summer twilight upstairs gazing out upon the warm, tired city, the jumble of roofs and irregular buildings among the rather crooked intersection of streets below, she faced the idea, which had by slow degrees been forcing itself as fact upon her mind, that she was very much alone in a great world where she must speedily as possible become a breadwinner.

Perhaps the sense of injustice in having left her so completely ignorant of what such a change would imply helped to make Alison's grief for her cousin's loss easier to bear. She had, in deference to the old lady's wishes, attempted no mourning garments, but had grieved and very truly respected her in her heart. Now, in spite of herself, she could not but see how for years a cold, selfish method had been pursued. In waiting upon, amusing, keeping her old cousin company she had been allowed to waste much precious time, for since she was fourteen her education had been of a very desultory sort, abounding in real study of certain branches which had caught her own fancy, yet wofully lacking in "rudiments." The only discipline of life had been the lesson of patience her cousin's whims and oddities taught; of practical knowledge she was almost entirely ignorant, and but for certain traits of character and gifts of mind with which nature

had endowed the girl she would have been pitifully helpless in the great, and to her lonely, world.

But above and beyond all else Alison, as the very poise of her head and carriage of her slender, but firm, young figure showed, was independent by instinct, habit, and inclination. There was an innate bouyancy about her, a sort of calm, self-reassuring faith in things "seen and unseen," which even Mrs. Gildersleeve's cold, cut and dried sort of theories failed to impress; and while fully realizing her own deficiencies, still the girl had never yet opened her eyes on a day in which she had allowed herself to say, "I will fail"; and the very fact of repeated disappointments the past week had only made her see more clearly that she must not hope for too much, must not expect just the kind of work she would like, but be ready to take whatever honorable employment was offered her. When it came to summing up her claims as a toiler, she had even laughed at her own lack of what was required in a school-teacher, governess, private secretary, or any such professional capacity. What she knew really well or could do creditably would have no market for her, as she found. In advertising she had been at a loss as to what to demand. She had no experience as a "saleslady"; she could at best be only a very second-rate "assistant" to a dressmaker; she might teach the *very* "young" if only the "rudiments" were required, for her knowledge of art in foreign countries, her fluent French and German, seemed to be of small account unaccompanied by experience.

One hope now remained, but that was on so slender a basis that Alison, as she turned her steps homeward, felt it too weak to be classed even among the probabilities, especially as a letter she had written on the strength of it at least two weeks ago remained unanswered.

Among Mrs. Gildersleeve's papers Alison had found an unfinished letter to a Mrs. Broderick, evidently a friend of long standing, possibly a family connection. The letter spoke of Alison as likely to be soon "alone," in "need of employment"; it referred to former intimacy, mentioned a town called Exeford, in which was the only inheritance Alison had received from her father—a tiny cottage which rented at forty dollars a year.

Alison had found this letter in an addressed envelope, and had, with a few lines stating her present needs and position, forwarded it to this unknown friend or relative of her late cousin's. The address was in care of a law firm, and Alison, hearing nothing, concluded they must be either ignorant of "Mrs. Broderick's" whereabouts or the lady herself averse to picking up any broken threads, whether sundered by time or death. Still she could not feel altogether hopeless. When things are at their darkest, we look most eagerly for the tiny ray of silver, and youth, after all, is a power in itself. Alison, as she tried to keep in the shade on her homeward walk, persuaded herself to a dozen comforting theories in regard to Mrs. Broderick's silence. She very probably was not in New York such weather as this, or might be considering what to say, to suggest. Anything was better, thought the young girl as she rang Mrs. Norton's bell, than complete despondency.

CHAPTER II.

THE Nortons occupied one of the old-fashioned brick houses not far from the square which a few decades ago were fresh from the builder's hands, and, as Mrs. Norton was fond of saying, designed for the "*real aristocracy*"; but Benton Place to-day knows no patent to nobility, its quiet dwellings aspiring only to be respectable and genteel, as well as "let" to an orderly class of tenants. The Nortons were unusually interested in, and kind to, their young lodger, and she in turn decidedly grateful for their protection, which prevented her feeling wholly cast upon the world. She made not the least secret of her position, even to the exact state of her finances, and the mother and daughters, two cheery, active girls, were as much interested as though old friends in our heroine's daily efforts, her chances of success, her hopes, her disappointments, even failures.

Now as Nora, the youngest girl, opened the door for their young lodger it was with an air of mystery or suppressed excitement.

"He's in the parlor," she whispered eagerly. "Oh, you didn't know, of course! He said he had written, but his letter must be the one in the stand drawer that came while you were out. He wants to see you at once."

Alison thanked the girl hurriedly, pausing in the hall just long enough to see that her letter was from the firm in whose care Mrs. Broderick's correspondence had been addressed. In briefest business fashion it simply stated

that "our clerk, Mr. Powers, will call about 5 P. M. in connection with a letter to our client Mrs. Rachel Broderick," and was signed "Wilks & Allan."

Alison glanced hastily in the little hall mirror as she removed her hat and passed her fingers lightly through the soft chestnut hair waving naturally on her brow. Heat had the effect of making her pale, not flushed, and the tone of her eyes under their dark lashes seemed deeper in consequence, the pretty crimson of her lips preventing any thought of over-delicacy in the white of the skin. But what she looked like was the least of Alison's considerations. Her heart was beating anxiously in nervous, if hopeful, strokes as she turned the handle of the parlor door and went in.

A small, dark-haired, sedate-looking man of fifty rose to receive her greeting with a half-questioning glance at her blue and white attire.

Alison smiled faintly.

"I am Alison Fane," she said in her soft, girlish accents. "I am not wearing black, because my cousin especially desired I should not."

"Very sensible, miss," said Mr. Powers, reseating himself, and holding his straw hat in both hands between his knees, while in a rapid glance at the girlish figure in one corner of the sofa near by he reflected that she was "tip-top," "quite a little lady," and then said in an alert, business-like tone: "We forwarded your letter, Miss Fane, to our client, and—h'm—well, she considered it carefully and commissioned me to say she will be glad to see you, but not to expect too much, as she is a—well, in fact, recluse is her own word. She mixes, she says, with too few people to be of any particular service to you."

Alison listened to the rather halting sentences with

entire attention, but a puzzled expression not lost upon the little man.

"But, Mr. Powers," she said when he had finished, "if she feels she can be of no service, why should I trouble her with a visit?"

"Oh, don't misunderstand me, my dear," exclaimed Mr. Powers anxiously. "She—well—feared you would build too much on mere relationship or *connection*."

"Relationship! connection!" exclaimed Alison, with changing color. "I had not the least idea that such a thing existed!"

It was Mr. Powers' turn to look surprised, and he did so with the promptest elevation of his brows and pursing up of his lips.

"Can that be possible?" he said, wiping his forehead with his white silk handkerchief, and staring at the young girl before him as if to be sure there was no dissimulation in her apparently frank speech. But an instant's reflection showed him that she would be the last one anxious to disclaim knowledge of a connection with Mrs. Broderick. "Why, she supposed you knew of it, of course, although, come to think of it, she *did* say she had requested Mrs. Gildersleeve not to make it known, but we know what that means between two women." He smiled shrewdly.

Alison leaned her head on her hand, deep in thought, too much surprised to speak for a moment, since she realized how much might lie back of this revelation. Mrs. Gildersleeve's cautious manner in regard to any family matter, her apparent loneliness, lack of all ties of kinship, the fact that while abroad she had encouraged Alison in going among her friends, even allowing her some "society," while at home in their own country no nun could have led a more secluded life—all these hitherto

meaningless ideas or "caprices" of her late cousin seemed now to take on a curious importance. Bright, alert, spirited as she was by nature, Alison was singularly devoid of curiosity, and it had prevented any but the most casual enquiries into the cause for any dictum her cousin and guardian had uttered. But this news of actual relationship with a person hitherto no more than a name to her made the young girl see that both of the past and future there would be much to learn.

"She never spoke of Mrs. Broderick to me," Alison said at last, lifting her young eyes with a gravely anxious look in them to Mr. Powers' face. "It was by the merest chance I sent that unfinished letter, and only because"—her cheek colored—"I had tried so many ways to get employment, and every day made it only more important."

"Mrs. Gildersleeve's income, then, died with her?" Mr. Powers said, really interested now in this lonely, but independent, young creature who looked at once ill fit to cope with the rougher side of bread-winning, yet fully equal to a spirited contest with any fate.

"Yes; when all was settled, there was barely anything left, and work of some kind, you see, was necessary."

"Yes; but it is strange she made no provision for you. She must have known——"

Alison interrupted him.

"It is useless to discuss it, sir. My cousin's health for a long time made even talking on business a dangerous excitement, but I fully believe she intended to make matters clear to me from little things she said, only at the last her death was terribly sudden."

"Ah, yes—um, yes," assented the legal gentleman, nodding his head sagely. "Put it off and put it off, the way

I've seen many a one do. Well, my dear young lady," he added in a brisker tone, "all that's neither here nor there. This isn't *business*—at least the business in hand. Mrs. Broderick desired me to say that she will be pleased to see you to-morrow morning about ten o'clock, when she will discuss matters with you. Do you know your way about? She lives in rather an out of the way place, though even in *my* boyhood the neighborhood was considered a most genteel one. Anyway, it's her oldest home, I believe, and the old lady clings to it. If anyone could persuade her to move, it might add ten years to her life, but so far no one has."

He was writing an address on the back of his own card as he spoke, and handed it to the still thoughtful, puzzled Alison. The street was quite unknown to her, but she could easily find it, or Molly Norton would go with her.

"Thank you," the young girl said quietly, and as Mr. Power's rose to depart, she added with a quick smile and blush: "Oh, one thing more, if you please. You spoke of my relationship to Mrs. Broderick. Can you tell me, sir, if you please, what it is?"

Mr. Powers, hat in hand, stared again, and then laughed good-humoredly.

"Well, upon my word, my dear child," he said indulgently, "it's about time you hunted up your family tree! Mrs. *Broderick*! Why, she's your *grandmother*!"

CHAPTER III.

ALISON remained standing for five minutes just where Mr. Powers left her, too completely overcome by the surprising revelation in his last words to either move or speak. The transition from a state in which one has fancied one's self almost without kith or kin to that in which so definite a lineal relation is discovered would overwhelm the staidest among us, and Alison was young enough to have it come upon her with a force in which all feelings but absolute wonder and surprise were forgotten; since, as she presently found herself thinking, one's cousins may exist anywhere unknown to us upon the earth's surface, but a being so closely allied as a parent's own mother to have been all one's life an unknown quantity, so to speak, seemed almost too strange to be true. Yet the pleasant, elderly gentleman who had, after sending his bombshell, just departed could not have been mistaken. How surprised he had seemed that she was unaware of such a connection! How actually incredulous he had looked! But his surprise or bewilderment was as nothing to her own. Alison presently moved away in a mechanical fashion with some dim idea of reaching her own room to "think it all out," for the family supper, which by arrangement she shared, would not take place until nearly seven, and it was as yet not six o'clock.

No one met her on the way upstairs, and even in those first half-dazed moments Alison decided that, at all events until after her interview with Mrs. Broderick next day,

she would say nothing of the most important piece of news Mr. Powers had brought her. A queer dread lest the meeting prove in some way unsatisfactory governed even her pleasure in finding herself less wholly friendless than she had supposed, but she was glad of the relief which even knowing of and expecting to see so near a relative had already given her. It was something, it was *much*, to the poor child, the desolate young orphan, to feel herself possessed of one really human tie.

“And yet,” thought Alison as she entered her own room, and, taking off her hat, flung herself into a deep chair by the window, “only last night I was wondering if I could really believe *He* cares for the widowed and the orphaned! Oh! God send it may mean at least work of some honest sort to me!”

Alison leaned back, her eyes fixed on the roofs and tree-tops, the lurid sky seen from her window, while thoughts of the farthest past rose in her remembrance—pictures suddenly forming themselves, the very elements of which she had been scarcely conscious before of remembering. But now all took on a distinct importance. Those questions of parentage, those far-away memories of her childhood which she had never discussed with anyone, were of supreme value, since on the morrow she was to stand face to face with her mother’s parent—she knew it must be on her mother’s side, since her father’s parents were long since dead.

Of her baby days Alison remembered only that they were spent in the country somewhere; then had come a journey at sea, during which she recalled the terror of a storm, and her sense of security when her father held her closely in his strong arms; later scenes were in a French seaport town, where her mother died, where she had

some happy days in her father's company,—she recalled perfectly his studio, the people who visited them, who petted, indulged, caressed her,—and although she knew her parents must have been very poor, she remembered no actual privation. Then came the dreariest time of all, when she was perhaps twelve years of age: they had been back once to America and returned to Dieuville—her father's long illness, death, and the arrival of Mrs. Gildersleeve, with whom when "all was over" she had gone away. Strange enough it now seemed to the girl that in all these recollections none supplied the least hint of family history, ties, or connection, except that slender one with Mrs. Gildersleeve, and Alison regretted now keenly both her own lack of curiosity and her old cousin's persistent reticence. Strange indeed did it seem to be about to meet so near a relative as her grandmother in total ignorance of all concerning her own mother and father's past! How would it impress Mrs. Broderick? Might it not even imply that somewhere hung a cloud which darkened the histories of those so dear to her? But however that might be, thought Alison, to believe her father guilty of anything disgraceful was impossible. No. Unfortunate he might have been, probably was, but guilty or disgraced—never. Her memories were too clear to admit of doubt on this score at least; and there rose before her mental vision a picture of the fine, open, kindly face of her father, Donald Fane—the clear, speaking eyes, the noble brow, the well-formed nose and finely curved lips, all candor, honesty, nobility's very self; and Alison, without in the least knowing why, instinctively arrayed herself against this newly discovered kinswoman, believing, since she had never sought her, Fane's only child, she must have undervalued him.

But, in spite of this defensive armor against any discoveries on the morrow, Alison went down at seven o'clock to the family living- and dining-room, the front basement, with a very cheerful manner and expression. Hope had been thoroughly aroused. She was young, naturally light-hearted, and ready to take as bright a view of life as the fates would permit.

Mrs. Norton, a stout, good-humored woman of forty-five, was just placing the last dish on the supper-table, and looked up to say: "Too hot this weather for cooked food, aint it, my dear?" a stereotyped remark since the heated term had set in, and Alison said the usual "Oh, yes, of course," as she took her place, with the widow and her daughters and a tall, reserved-looking young man, the only son and hope of the family, assembled to do justice to bread and butter, cold ham, and a fresh-looking salad, with tea, which Alison drank always from thirst or courtesy alone.

"Well, Miss Fane, I hope your friend brought good news," Mrs. Norton said in her cheery voice, glancing at Alison's brightening young face. "You *look* smarter."

"He desired me to call on Mrs. Broderick to-morrow," Alison answered, smiling. "I don't know what to expect, but she would hardly have sent for me, I think, unless it was to my advantage."

"No, indeed," Mrs. Norton and Molly had just said together when Connor, the grave young man, enquired:

"Broderick, did you say the name was?" and on Alison's nodding in assent he continued: "We've done some work for a Mrs. Broderick in our office"—a real estate agent's. "I wonder if it is the same."

"I don't know, of course," said Alison, and, eager to hear something of her unknown kinswoman from an impartial

stranger, she added: "This lady is very old, I fancy. She lives in an out of the way place—18 Mordick Street."

Connor Norton's shrewd, quiet eyes gleamed.

"The very same," he exclaimed. "Well, Miss Fane, if you make anything out of *her*, you'll be smarter than most of us."

He turned again to his supper, but Alison was too anxious for further particulars to let the subject rest there.

"Why, do tell me, Mr. Norton; I am—she is a perfect stranger to me! Can't you give me some hints or points that may help me? Do, please."

"Why, yes, Connor," said his mother, regarding her son with complacency and pride. "I'm sure, Miss Fane, if anyone could put you up to a point or two, it would be Connor, for, quiet as he is, he takes it all in."

"Oh, bother!" laughed the object of these remarks, looking, nevertheless, fully aware of his own importance. "I guess, mother, Miss Fane's smart enough to see it for herself. I only meant," he added, turning with a judicial air to Alison, who sat on his right hand, "that the old lady has the name of being a dreadful screw. But there's money enough there! Why, the last piece of property she bought from us we offered her an advance of twenty per cent. on a month later! We'd never have sold it at the figure we did if the boss had been home. He was mad, I can tell you, when he came back. But the old girl wouldn't give it up, and it's doubled in value since."

"But is she—miserly?" Alison asked, with a contraction of the heart again.

"I guess so," young Norton answered slowly. "At least the only time I was in the house on Mordick Street I thought she looked to live like it. She seems pretty well alone in the world."

"Yes," said Alison in a low tone, "we are related, this gentleman told me, yet, as I never heard of her before, I can scarcely believe it until I see her."

"Related!" exclaimed Nora eagerly. "Why, Miss Fane, perhaps you'll turn out to be her heiress! Like someone in a book or a play!"

Alison laughed and shook her head.

"No such destiny, my dear," she answered. "Mrs. Broderick, I think, would have hardly ignored my existence all these years if she intended anything so fine at this late date. No, indeed. If she will only put me in the way of a good means of earning my living, I'll be more than thankful."

"And very sensible you are, my dear," declared Mrs. Norton. "Dead men's shoes wear out in waiting for them. I'd rather stand and work in my own any day. Don't you fret, Miss Alison! You won't need to be idle long. Why, perhaps Molly's boss will send for you yet. Especially as you looked so nice in that new mantle. You're just the one for a figure in a shop like Been & Harrison's."

Alison's smile and sigh together were expressive. It was difficult to say why, but she shrank from work such as good-hearted Molly Norton was trying to obtain for her in the large establishment where she worked herself; still, as she knew, she could not "pick and choose." If the interview with her grandmother came to nothing, then she would beg Molly to redouble her efforts, and go with her the very next day to interview the dreaded Mr. Been himself. Something within her, however, made Alison feel sure she could cope with a field in which her brains would be better utilized than in the mere standing as a lay figure upon which mantles and wraps and coats could be draped

and tried on. Surely her grandmother—how strange even to think of applying the title to anyone!—would use whatever influence she had to obtain some more congenial employment, even though it involved hard work, for Alison's whole nature was refined, and every plan for activity was with a hope that her work should be something as improving as it was useful. To lead a life such as these simple, kindly friends of hers the Nortons did, for instance, would be, Alison thought as, supper over, she lingered with the family for a while, intolerable to her, yet it might easily enough become the only kind of existence open. It was certainly not because Molly or Nora's work of itself was deteriorating—the former was one of the principal "cutters" at Been & Harrison's, the latter was cashier in a stationer's store on Broadway—but the whole endeavor of life seemed with them to be fulfilled in earning their wages, and enjoying an "evening out" at theatre, dance, or park, dressed stylishly, well escorted, and in what they considered "jolly" company; its end and aim, in short, getting as much that was good to eat and wear, as much so-called "fun," as their purses, circle, and opportunities afforded. Their literature was of the usual weekly story-paper order, with an occasional cheap novel; their views of that wider, nobler life which Alison yearned to enjoy, as well as of the cruder, narrower one nearer home, were based on their own instincts and ideas; and, in spite of abundant natural good nature and genuine kindness of heart, shown our heroine constantly, their opinions of people, their motives, were so narrow that Alison looked on, listened often in wonderment. She could not have been happy herself with such a "point of view," but when a chance word escaped showing her opinions as very different, Mrs. Norton would smile, shake

her head, and say sagely: "It's all very well, my dear, to feel like that for a while. But you'll find real life and real people very different."

Still Alison clung obstinately to her own ideas. Until some terribly severe wrench came to force judgment, inclination, instinct, as well as faith wholly asunder, she would picture life and the world, and believe humanity in general, to be what she thought, hoped, it was, and, at all events, it made her own daily life easier to bear. Some rose-colored shafts from the light of fancy entered, touching and warming her own existence. "If I am foolish or romantic," she would sometimes say to herself, "I shall at least not find it out at once, and meanwhile I like to think and feel as I do."

But it did not affect her practical view as to her own needs and hopes where work was concerned; nor did it in the least encourage any such romantic view concerning Mrs. Broderick as Nora Norton had suggested. Fortunately for herself and others, Alison possessed a decided vein of common-sense which checked her flight just in time, and made her able to smile at anything exaggerated in her own ideas. She sat on the end of the old sofa while the hot summer evening drifted along, only half hearing the girls chatter about a trip planned for Coney Island the next day.

"Oh, Miss Alison, do come," pleaded Nora. "You know, we can't get away until four o'clock, but the boys will meet us at the boat, and it will be a lovely evening's sail up."

"Perhaps I will," said Alison after a moment. She had felt the heat severely, and had had not a moment's change of air all summer. She need not talk much. The rest of the party were quite sufficient to themselves, and she could

enjoy the sea-breeze and the long beach and the moonlight sail home. It was very kind of the girls, she reflected, to ask her, since they knew on one or two expeditions to the park she had not been a very lively companion. But there it was. Genuine kindness of heart was really as natural as the spirit of carping criticism they had simply indulged themselves in, with no idea whatever of unkindness, nor that thereby they were ignoring one of the grandest principles of humanity: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," nor that when St. Paul wrote his sublime treatise on the great virtues of life he meant for just such careless tongues the final admonition: "But the greatest of these is charity."

Alison went up to her room early. The storm had burst, and lashed her window-panes fiercely long after she was in bed trying to sleep. Her prayers had been offered humbly, eagerly, hopefully. She did not dare expect much, nor lose sight of what Connor Norton's hint implied, but she fell asleep with better heart and more contented feeling than had been hers since death robbed her of the only natural protector she knew.

CHAPTER IV.

ALISON was awake early, glad to see that the storm had cleared the sky and somewhat cooled the atmosphere. But it was decidedly too warm to wear her only really smart dress, a black lace and silk; moreover, as she decided, a simple morning costume would be in better taste on such a visit; and in the cool-looking gray cambric with belt of black ribbon, and a small black hat, with violets for trimming, Alison fully justified Mrs. Norton's favorite expression that she was "quite the little lady."

Mordick Street, although long since forgotten by its once fashionable denizens, was not a long walk, and Molly's directions were explicit enough to make Alison independent of any escort. She set out about half-past nine, feeling on excellent terms with the world once more, a quiet gleam of hope and youthful expectancy lighting her face and giving vigor to her step. After all, so near a relative as a grandmother could not be wholly unresponsive. If she were very old and ill and lonely, how gladly, thought the young girl, she would minister to her wants and help cheer her declining years! Old age had always attracted Alison. When she was still a child, she well remembered being laughed at by her little comrades in Dieuville for her devotion to two or three aged people in the place. When she carried fruit to old Menie Despard, and sat all of a long summer's afternoon in the poor creature's miserable dwelling, how the other children had ridiculed her! But Alison at eight years old was

spirited enough to hold her own, and no amount of banter interfered with the generous intentions of her childish heart; nor would even a rebuff now, she decided, dishearten her at the start. She framed resolutions full of disinterested benevolence toward the relative who had so long ignored her existence, and reached No. 18 determined that, on her side at all events, the meeting should be friendly, if not affectionate.

The street was one of a few in the old region of the city which have retained the air of aristocratic seclusion and even elegance which marked their first period. The brick houses with the dormer-roofed upper stories, which were unbroken save by two shops at wide intervals along the street, had a dignity of their own in spite of the fact that fashion, grace, all external signs of distinction, had long since crept further north and westward. But nearly every house bore a small sign with "Furnished rooms to let" at one side of the hall-door. No. 18 was on the corner; its design was decidedly the oldest and most imposing in the street, yet even the outer expression of the many windows, the door-way itself, the area and basement entrance, looked gloomy. There was no bell, and Alison lifted the old-fashioned knocker with a slightly nervous dread of what might follow.

A tall, rather gaunt woman of fifty or thereabout, in a rusty black alpaca and small lace cap, admitted her; evidently she was expected, for, scarcely waiting to hear the young girl's enquiry, she opened the door of a sitting-room to the left of the hall, and, requesting Alison to be seated, went leisurely up the stairs.

Alison glanced eagerly about her. If this were her kinswoman's parlor or living-room, it might offer some suggestion or clue to her habits and ideas. Anything

drearier can scarcely be imagined. The carpet, though clean, was nearly threadbare; the horse-hair furniture was worn; the portraits on the walls, well executed, it is true, were of men and women—there were four—severely plain in feature and dress. Not an ornament of any kind, not even a book, broke the chilling severity of the parlor, for such it evidently was. Large folding doors, heavily panelled, divided it from a rear room; the lofty ceiling was adorned with a garland in plaster above the pendent for a chandelier swathed in yellow gauze. On the high, ugly chimney-piece was a clock which had stopped at seven o'clock on some by-gone night or morning. Altogether a room more completely devoid of individuality or anything which could indicate the tastes or methods of its owner could not well be imagined, unless, indeed, in its ugly bareness it spoke of a cold, unfeeling, miserly nature.

Alison had not long to wait. The gaunt serving-woman returned in a few moments, and, with a wintry sort of smile, informed the visitor that "Mrs. Broderick was not up, but would see Miss Fane in her room," and, turning, led the way up a staircase the carpet of which was really beyond patching and decidedly insecure. Her guide looked back once or twice to say: "Take care, miss—there's a loose piece there," or: "Be careful, miss," but offered no apology for the miserable condition of things, nor any further remark, as she opened a door over the parlor and ushered her into a large dimly lighted room. A huge four-poster, at the side facing the door, riveted Alison's attention, for in it, propped up by several pillows, was her nearest relative on earth—her grandmother—Mrs. Rachel Broderick.

A woman who might have been sixty-five, or ten years older. Her face was thin, ivory white, pinched, and

haggard, yet no one could doubt that the worn features, and the dark eyes, had once been beautiful; but the ravages of time were nothing, it was clear, to those of the spirit, the nature, of the lonely old woman. The eyes, under their frowning brows, if "windows of the soul," showed that soul full of suspicion, avarice, and the restlessness of an overburdened life and sordid nature. The thin lips were closed in a sharp line; the chin, resolute and square, expressed the energy of spirit which would linger in the old woman until death itself. A cap of clean white cambric concealed all but the very front of Mrs. Broderick's iron-gray hair. Over her night-dress was a gown of faded red silk, and the hands resting on the coverlet, white and bony, were sparkling with jewelled rings.

Alison tried to smile, to speak, as she gazed at this spectre of her ideal old "grandmother," whom she could caress and comfort, while Mrs. Broderick, it was evident, was studying the young girl closely. But, whatever she thought or felt, she said in a sharp tone:

"Well, you are Alison Fane, eh? Sit down. Janet"—to the attendant—"push over that chair."

Janet did as she was bid; Alison likewise obeyed her grandmother's ungraciously uttered command, and Mrs. Broderick, without altering the fixed gaze, continued:

"Powers tells me you never heard of me before. Is that true?"

Alison, who had swiftly resolved to be as gentle as she could, flushed quickly.

"True? Certainly, ma'am." It was difficult to know by what name or title to address this old lady, so Alison made a compromise between the too formal "Mrs. Broderick" and the thoroughly unfamiliar "grandmother."

"H'm. That seems queer, although I did make Jane Gildersleeve agree I shouldn't be bothered." The old lady looked at her young visitor with if possible still more intensity, and added: "Didn't you know who your parents were?"

"Yes, ma'am," rejoined Alison, a curious fearlessness coming to her beneath Mrs. Broderick's sharp scrutiny. "I knew that my mother's maiden name was Ruth Fairfax, and my father was Donald Fane. My mother died when I was little more than a baby."

"You were three years old, if not four," said Mrs. Broderick. "Did your father never speak of me?"

Something—no doubt the consciousness that her dear father had been wronged—lit Alison's soft eyes with unwonted fire and gave a peculiar pride to her tone as she answered:

"Never; I have a faint remembrance of hearing of someone named Fairfax, never of my grandmother."

"My second husband was Broderick," the old lady said shortly. "Well, I suppose your father knew any appeal to me after your mother's disobedience in marrying him would be useless. It is true we held no communication but let me tell you it was I who sent Jane Gildersleeve to look you up, on the distinct understanding I was not to be brought into the matter."

A look, half of enquiry, half of gratitude, softened Alison's face. "Then my life with her—my expenses," she asked eagerly—"have I to thank you for them?"

"Humph! as for thanks," retorted Mrs. Broderick, "I don't know that I look or care for any, as it was a business arrangement to suit my own convenience. It was easier for me to give a small allowance to Jane than to be bothered with continual applications or to have had you

actually on my hands. I never pretend to take credit for anything undeserved."

"Nevertheless," said Alison, with a faint smile, "I thank you. Since my cousin's death my experience has shown me how dreadful it would have been had I been cast on the world alone when my poor father died."

"And what do you intend doing now?" demanded Mrs. Broderick, with another searching look.

Alison smiled. "Whatever I can," she answered, and briefly related her efforts, the suggestion Mary Norton had made about Been & Harrison's. Mrs. Broderick listened shrewdly. Not a gleam of sympathy was there in her expression nor any apparent interest; she was evidently considering the question in a purely business light.

"Then you are not afraid of work?" she said as Alison concluded her statement of the case.

"On the contrary, I am just now very much afraid of idleness."

Mrs. Broderick leaned back among her pillows, folded her hands, and closed her eyes, evidently to aid reflection. Alison, in silence not altogether uncheerful, traced the pattern of the well-worn carpet noiselessly with the point of her parasol, looked up at the green blind of the window, around at the faded, cumbersome furniture, the desk crowded to overflowing with papers and documents of all kinds, the table laden with the paraphernalia of a sick room, all more or less dusty, poverty-stricken, and uninviting to every sense. The heat and glare of the day had been partially excluded, yet the atmosphere was decidedly heavy, and Alison as she sat there, once or twice letting her eyes rest on the worn old figure under the bed-clothes, the flashing rings alone betokening anything but actual poverty, wondered why on the threshold of

eternity Mrs. Broderick could not allow herself a more comfortable existence, a condition of things in which she could give her soul time to awaken and know its needs and hopes, its claims on the eternal!

The old lady's black eyes opened slowly. "Well," she observed, "I see you weren't afraid I had gone to sleep. Perhaps you expect something very fine now. I've just been calculating what it would cost me to keep you here for a few days or weeks at furthest."

Alison found nothing to say, and Mrs. Broderick continued:

"As prices go now I might do it for \$1.75 a week. Now the question is, How could you make it pay me?"

For an instant the young girl was tempted to end the discussion by declaring she would find a home and employment elsewhere, but a very brief consideration showed her that, for the present at least, it was better to have the shelter and protection of her grandmother's roof and name. It would at least deprive her of that feeling of complete human isolation. It would create, what she so needed, a natural tie; it would give her some proper footing even in the search for employment which she would not abandon; and there could be no injustice to her grandmother in accepting hospitality for such purely business reasons, since by her own words Mrs. Broderick showed that she offered nothing *gratis*.

"One dollar and seventy-five cents a week!" answered Alison, smiling. "I pay Mrs. Norton three dollars now for my table board, so I hardly think, ma'am, you could do it for less. However, in return I will try to make myself useful."

"What can you do?"

"In what line?"

"Never mind—anything. Can you read aloud?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! Cousin Jane always liked my reading."

"And can you keep accounts?"

"If not too difficult. I always kept hers—ours, even when we travelled."

"Do you know how to make a shilling or a quarter go it's full value?"

Alison laughed. "I ought to! I've never had a penny to throw away since—since I was very young."

Mrs. Broderick was again silent. "Very well," she said at last, "we can try it, anyway. Remember, I promise nothing. If at the end of the first week it doesn't work, I'll try to get you something to do elsewhere. Only mind one thing: My will is made long ago and I haven't mentioned you in it, nor shall I change it. If you turn out well, and do your duty by me, I may see that you have three or four hundred dollars to start you in life when I am gone. And another point: This is what you will probably call a dull house, and your coming or going won't alter it. I don't wish anyone calling upon you, and I won't have any gadding about. You can take a walk every day, but I won't have any fallalling. I'm not asking you to stay or to go—only if you do go, that is, if you don't accept my offer, I never wish to hear from you again."

Alison listened with mingled feelings to this long and utterly unfeeling address. A dozen answers rose to her lips, her cheeks flushed and paled again, but in pursuance of her first decision she forced herself to say quietly:

"Very well, grandmother. As it is your house, you have a right to make the rules for those in it. As you say, we can but try it."

"Humph! Well, go downstairs—you can find your way to the kitchen—and tell Janet Holdsworthy to warm my broth and bring it up to me."

Alison was by no means unwilling to leave the sick chamber, and went downstairs, remembering Janet's caution at every step, and found the kitchen staircase without difficulty. In spite of the same air of retrenchment and severity which marked the house, so far as she had seen it, there was something quite cheerful about Janet's domain. It had been built when the house was intended for a large, wealthy family, and its generous proportions, many closets, ample range, and good side-board suggested comfort, while the windows, opening on a square of garden in the rear, were cheerful and set off by curtains of dotted lace, much washed and mended, but clean, as was everything in Janet's domain. The woman herself looked decidedly more attractive, Alison thought, as she saw her for the second time, and before she had made known her errand Janet had approached, and, wiping her eyes on the corner of her white apron, bent down and, to the young girl's surprise, kissed her cheek.

"Eh! my dear," she said, shaking her head, "I wonder old madame didn't cry out when she saw you! You're as like your dear, sweet mother as her own picture!"

"What!" exclaimed Alison eagerly. "Did you know her, Janet?"

"*Did I!*" said the old woman scornfully. "Didn't I dress and wash her day in and day out till she could do it for herself? Didn't she cry her pretty eyes out many a time on my shoulder? Ah, my dear! I was the last she kissed as she left home on her wedding morning."

Alison, whether from the really nervous strain she had undergone of late, or from something irresistibly sorrow-

ful in the good woman's tone and words, it was impossible to say, broke down suddenly and burst into tears.

"There! there! honey," said Janet soothingly. She took her in her still vigorous arms, doubtless as she had often done her poor young mother, and, removing her hat, smoothed and stroked Alison's soft chestnut hair with one of her thin, but gentle, hands. "Never mind! If words of mine can keep you here, here you'll stay, and maybe—who knows, dear?—God 'll soften her hard old heart *in time*."

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Janet returned to the kitchen after an absence of nearly twenty minutes, Alison had composed herself, and was standing in the window trying to imagine how the ordeal of the coming week would be endured; for, in spite of the relief which an assured resting-place and protection gave her, she felt very little doubt but that life in the gloomy old house would, as her grandmother had said, be dull indeed. However, Janet's affectionate friendliness would go far to reconcile her, and if she could escape from Mrs. Broderick for an occasional chat with the one who recalled her mother so tenderly, things would not be quite cheerless.

"Well, my dear!" said Janet, coming in almost briskly, "she's been telling me, your grandmother, that you're come to stay! At least she says for you to go back to your boarding-house now, pack up and"—Janet smiled grimly—"pay up and get a receipt, and be here before nightfall. You'd best come early," added Janet, "for, you see, she has her bit of supper about six o'clock, and it won't do to be later; maybe there 'd be nothing for us, d'ye see?"

Alison laughed and thought she did see, and, understanding her grandmother was not to be disturbed for any leave-taking, bade Janet good-by, and hastened back to Benton Place, where the contrast of the cheerful, if a trifle vulgar, household to the gloomy one she had just quitted was a decided relief. Mrs. Norton was sewing

in the front basement with Nora, who had taken half a day off in view of the evening's amusement, and both mother and daughter greeted her, looking up from the muslins and edgings they were busy over, with a cheery "Well! how d'ye do again? Come in, my dear."

And Alison, really grateful, and glad of their friendly sympathy, plunged at once into her story.

"Your grandmother! Well, I declare, Alison!" exclaimed Mrs. Norton. "Then I guess your bread's buttered for life! Connor isn't one not to know what he's talking about, and he says the old lady's worth a round million!"

"Oh, I hardly think that," said Alison, ready enough for the lunch Nora busied herself preparing, "and, anyway, she seems very careful in money matters."

"Never mind, though at her age——" Mrs. Norton ended the sentence with a significant uplifting of the brows.

"I don't mean to go there with any false notions or expectations," declared Alison, smiling, "and, indeed, dear Mrs. Norton, I'm honestly sorry to be leaving you; you have all been very kind."

"Well, well, my dear, it isn't like good-by," said her landlady briskly. She was genuinely sorry herself to lose the pleasant company and good pay her young lodger had proved, and determined not to let her go out of sight completely. "We'll see you as often as you like. I don't suppose your grandmother 'd mind old friends calling or your coming to us."

Alison colored quickly. "Just at first I won't ask too many favors," she made haste to say. "And, oh, dear Mrs. Norton, you won't mind giving me a receipt, I am sure, for she is certain to ask me for it."

"And quite right," returned the landlady, fumbling

around for a scrap of paper in her capacious work-basket. "I always say business is business, keeps friends and makes no foes."

And when Alison paid her week's board in full, she received a scrawling bit of testimony to that effect, Mrs. Norton relating the while how much she had lost from carelessness herself in such matters. Then followed an hour of packing in her own room. Mrs. Gildersleeve's effects were in two square boxes, which Mrs. Norton agreed to keep for the present, and by four o'clock all was ready for Alison's first venture in life, alone, since she could hardly regard her acceptance of Mrs. Broderick's hospitality in any other light. It was only servitude of a different character from what she had been seeking or expected, and how it would result was entirely a problem for the future.

"I'm so sorry you can't go with us to-night!" said Nora, who was preparing to start when Alison did. "But never mind. I'll see we have another evening soon, and we won't forget you."

"And say good-by to the others," Alison answered. "I'll run up and see you all the first chance I get."

"Do, do. Your trunk is all ready for the man. Well, good-by, my dear, and good luck."

Alison was embraced affectionately by mother and daughter, who remained on the door-step until she had turned the corner, and, so far as they were concerned, was for the time being completely lost to view.

CHAPTER VI.

As she retraced her steps of the morning Alison's spirits rose and fell alternately as she considered the change she was making in every habit of life, for, in spite of much close companionship with Mrs. Gildersleeve, that lady had never restrained the girl's liberty nor hampered her independence. In fact, Alison's originality, her spice of daring, her quick powers of observation, had all amused and interested the older woman, who thoroughly enjoyed the results of allowing her at times what she called "full swing." Innately refined, and entirely pure in every thought and feeling, Alison had never run any risk of misusing such freedom. She knew as little of what is commonly called the world as a tiny child, but in her few social experiences she had observed with a keenness of wit and power of understanding which made her excellent company both during and after any little event. She was not yet twenty-one, but travel, combined with Mrs. Gildersleeve's boundless confidence in her, had matured her in some ways, while in others it left her still very young for her years. But her brief experience in Mor-dick Street that morning had been all-sufficient to show her that once there she would find herself walled into a very narrow space indeed. The question was how to make the best of her surroundings, how to secure a little freedom and liberty, neither of which would she ever, so far as she knew, abuse.

Her *rat-tat* on the door of No. 18 was quickly

answered by Janet Holdsworthy, who looked almost genial as she welcomed her. Indeed, it was only the dreariness of her life, the gloom of her surroundings, which had sapped the light-heartedness of the really kindly woman, and she was determined that, if Alison could endure to remain, she would do all that lay in her power to make her life tolerable, even to the extent of supplementing the scanty meals she knew would be provided from her own purse.

"Dear me! I'm glad to see you, my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Holdsworthy, ushering Alison in, "and I'm glad Mrs. Broderick's asleep, and I can just take you right up to your own room. You mustn't mind its being the attic, love; it's all she'd let me get ready for you, and I'm close by."

"Does she—my grandmother—sleep all alone downstairs?" half whispered Alison as she followed Janet softly up the second staircase.

Janet nodded.

"Yes, she says she likes it best, but she has a bell that goes up to my room right by my bed, and Jacob, my nephew, sleeps below nights. We're never afraid really since once, some time ago, the house was broke into and they found nothing worth carrying away. You see, she keeps everything down at the bank, and from that out no burglar ever bothered us."

By this time they were on the upper landing, and Janet threw open the door of a very large, if conspicuously bare, room, the main objects in which were a huge bed like that in her grandmother's room, a tall, old-fashioned chest of drawers, a dressing-table of antique pattern with a swinging mirror above tiny drawers, a large table, and one deep horse-hair easy chair. The floor was par-

tially covered by a square of reddish brown carpet. Three windows, two "dormers" and one tall, narrow one, afforded a fine view of the roofs of adjoining houses against the deep blue of the August sky. It was by no means a "bower" for "maiden meditation," nor was it more than merely comfortable, and yet something, whether in the air of being so far above the hum and bustle of the streets below, the spaciousness, or perhaps the quaint design of the room itself, pleased Alison at once. She ran over to the queer little dressing-table, and the mirror reflected a smiling face.

"Oh, I like this room, Janet," she exclaimed, "so much! I'm glad to be up here."

"Well, well, my dear, so much the better," said the woman, with a sigh. "It's cooler than you'd think for, and I am just across the hall, and so you needn't be lonely."

She helped Alison remove her hat and gloves, made her sit down in the one easy chair, and was just about offering her some suggestions as to what she might expect when Mrs. Broderick's bell sounded.

"There!" exclaimed Janet, jumping to her feet. "You may as well come down with me, Miss Alison, for she's sure to send for you."

Alison followed Janet to the second story, and stood a moment in the hall, while her grandmother's faithful attendant went in to let the old lady know she had come back. She returned quickly, ushering Alison into the invalid's room.

Mrs. Broderick's greeting was a curt nod and a "Sit down." Alison obeyed, waited, and wondered. At last her grandmother said slowly:

"Take your place at that table. You will find writing materials. Write as I dictate."

Alison looked for a whole and clean sheet of paper from the litter of odds and ends on the little table; at last one was found, she took up the pen, and after dating the letter wrote as follows:

“DEAR SIR:

“I am anxious to know whether my tenant in the Bend Lane house intends to remain after October 1. Also whether she will expect any repairing, as this I positively refuse to have done except at her expense. I am surprised that the accounts this month are not so satisfactory as last, especially as I understood the year was to be a very good one.

“Yours, etc.,

“RACHEL BRODERICK.”

When this was completed, Alison addressed the letter to “Josiah Gorman, Esq., Exeford, N. Y.,” little realizing all that both the name and address were to mean in her future, Mrs. Broderick’s only explanation being to the effect that Gorman was her manager in the town of Exeford, where the famous mills were running.

CHAPTER VII.

ALISON received a curt "Very well" from Mrs. Broderick as the old lady read the letter, after which, having stamped it, her grandmother watching her critically, she awaited further orders. But none came; nor did Mrs. Broderick seem inclined for conversation. Alison, deciding to keep some needle-work on hand for such entirely unoccupied moments, remained quietly seated until Janet's step along the hall heralded her entrance with Mrs. Broderick's tea-tray.

It contained a small wineglass of jelly, a plate with one thin slice of ham, ditto bread and butter, and a diminutive pot of tea. As Janet laid it on a lap-board before her mistress the old lady scrutinized the ham closely.

"Coming to the end of that piece of ham pretty quick, seems to me," she said dryly.

"Well, I've cut careful as I could, ma'am," was Mrs. Holdsworthy's mild rejoinder.

"Well, don't forget we've another mouth to feed," said the old lady sharply. "It won't do to have much more waste. Where have you set her tea?"

"Downstairs," said Janet in an apologetic tone. "You didn't speak of opening the dining-room."

"So you set it in the kitchen?" Mrs. Broderick laughed shortly. "What do you think of that, Alison?"

"I am very glad!" the girl exclaimed, rising to follow Janet. "Indeed, don't open the dining-room just for me, grandmother."

"I'll think about it," was the curt answer. "Now you needn't come back here for an hour."

Alison accepted her dismissal like a child let out early from school, and hurried downstairs after Janet, who was profuse in explanations as to why she had set the tea out in the kitchen, all of which Alison cut short by declaring it suited her much the best.

"If the dining-room is as gloomy as the parlor," she said, laughing, "I'd hate to take my meals alone there."

The kitchen, in the cool of the evening, was really cheerful and pleasant. Both the wide windows and door into the small garden stood open. The tea-service was of the cheapest quality, but daintily clean, and besides the slice of ham and bread and butter there was some fresh lettuce which Janet had invested in on her own account and a decidedly store-looking bun. But Alison's appetite was young and healthy. She enjoyed the simple meal, Janet answering her rapid questions rather briefly, it is true, but only because she disliked to show the girl who asked them how very little she ought to expect.

"Do you never go out, Janet?" Alison enquired, lingering in the door-way while the good woman washed the few tea things and put them away.

"Only to market early, miss, before Jacob leaves. Well, once in a very great while, perhaps, when anyone is with her on a Sunday afternoon, I take a walk or maybe get to church."

"Anyone?" demanded Alison. "Who does come here?"

Janet laughed grimly. "Not a very many, my dear," she answered. "There's Mr. Wilks, and Mr. Allan, and Mrs. Allan once in a while, and Mrs. Tom Parkinson, and old Miss Race. I'm always safe to go to church when

she's here. Then if Mr. Hugh Broderick comes, I'm sure of a good two hours clear."

"Mr. Hugh Broderick?" asked Alison. "Who is he?"

"Oh, your grandmother's nephew—that is, Mr. Broderick's nephew. He's longer than usual—ought to have been here last week. He's the one," continued Janet, "they do say who will get all her money."

"Oh, indeed! And is he young or old?"

Janet reflected in silence for a moment. "Well, miss, I should say middling," she answered. "But there—no, of course he isn't *old*. I meant compared to you, my dear. He's not just a boy, don't you see?"

"And I am—just a girl!" laughed Alison. "I wonder, Janet, who will come first."

"Mrs. Parkinson," said Mrs. Holdsworthy promptly. "And I tell you she'll look you through and through, and over and over! See if she doesn't! My goodness but she's watchful of everyone comes near your grandmother! It 'll fidget her to death till she knows just all about your coming and everything. Still I don't say but what she'll be kind in her own way, and it's a bright house to go to—if you're let."

"But who is she?" Alison was becoming decidedly interested, and afraid seven o'clock was near at hand.

"A sort of a cousin of Mr. Broderick's. I believe he brought her up. Then she married another kind of a cousin, and I know they expect something."

"But do all these people expect to inherit grandmother's property?" asked Alison, giving a little upward push to the soft hair on her brow and smiling comically.

"Most of them look for something," said Janet. She faced the slender, fine young figure leaning against the framework of the open door, with the bath of late sun-

light falling about it, and a queer, anxious look came into her old eyes.

"I'd give—oh, my dear, you don't know what I'd give to see you get it! My little blossom's child! It's rightfully yours, no one else's."

"Hush, hush, Janet dear!" Alison exclaimed, moving forward and startled by the almost fierce intensity of the Scotch woman's voice and expression. "Don't think of what I am sure will never happen. Grandmother told me herself she had made a will, but not in my favor. No; I shall be happier and do better for her and everybody if, unlike all these others, I never have such a thought in my mind. It must be terrible to be waiting for someone to die! and still worse for anyone to know others are waiting for it!"

Alison spoke with simplest feeling, and genuine sincerity, but although her expression softened, old Janet held her ground.

"But it's you that have the rights of it!" she maintained.

"I am not a Broderick," declared the girl lightly, "and that other one—Hugh, did you call him?—he is."

"But Broderick's money was made out of the Fairfaxes'," protested Janet, with a toss of her head. "What was he? Had a bit of an interest only in a mill the Fairfax money set going! I know," proudly insisted the family servitor of two generations.

"Never mind the old money!" exclaimed Alison. "I mean to forget it. Janet, what time am I to be up in the morning, and what shall I have to do?"

"That's more than I can tell you, dear. But it's seven now," as a neighboring church clock struck the hour. "You'd best go up and show you're punctual."

Alison ran lightly up through the softening shadows beginning to gather in the dingy old house. Her practical eye showed her where and how the stair-carpeting might be repaired, and she decided to consult Janet on the subject the next day.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. BRODERICK was apparently waiting for her. As she entered her grandmother pushed the watch she had been holding under her pillow, and gave her an almost approving nod.

"Open those shutters wide," said the old lady. "No use of a light while there's any sent us free."

Alison pushed back the cumbersome shutters of both windows, letting in all the glow of the evening, and with it the hum and bustle of the street below. Standing there a moment, she saw the door-steps on various houses opposite begin to fill with the occupants of the dwellings, who, the working day over, were glad of a breath of fresh air, even though laden with the heat of the sultry afternoon. They looked like respectable people, for the most part; Alison could hear their voices, rising and falling in speech or laughter, and there was a relief in the sense of not being wholly shut out from sight and sound of her fellow-beings, as the appearance of the old Broderick dwelling would lead one to fear might well be the case.

"Well," observed her grandmother, "what do you find to interest you so deeply?"

Alison turned her fair young face with a sunny smile to the withered, querulous one of the old lady.

"People," she said, coming back to her grandmother's bedside. "They always interest me. I never get tired wondering about them."

"Humph! poor business. It's my belief one-half the world are fools, the other half cheats."

"Oh, grandmother!" Alison laughed, but she was really shocked. "What a dreadful frame of mind to be in!"

"Dreadful!" exclaimed Mrs. Broderick tartly. "Not a bit of it! If you knew what I've gone through with, even since I laid here on my bed! Why, the very man supposed to be working in my best interest, that Gorman you wrote to, I don't doubt he's cheating me out of my eyes all the time!"

"But," persisted Alison softly, and sitting down again, "that does not mean everyone would be the same, and, besides, why don't you look into his conduct?"

The old lady smiled grimly.

"I keep as light a rein as I can, but one ought to be on the spot, behind the scenes—in fact, play detective—to really make out what such a clever rogue is up to."

Alison was silent for a moment; then she said with a very serious expression:

"And have you no one really interested enough in you, in your rights, to take care of all such matters?"

Mrs. Broderick lay back on her pillows with closed eyelids for a moment. Then she opened them, to bend the full force of her still brilliant dark eyes upon the girl before her.

"You ask a puzzling question, child; one I am just now asking myself over and over again. As I told you, my experience has made me thoroughly sceptical. Your grandfather, George Fairfax, was a man who would have ruined himself if he had been allowed through faith in others; Tom Broderick was different, but he made too many friends and cared too much for politics. Among

them all—the Broderick tribe, I mean—I only in any way trust or believe in one of them, and he seems bent on opposing every plan or idea I suggest.”

“Yet,” urged Alison, exceedingly anxious to hear more, “you say, you—trust him?”

“No, I didn’t!” snapped the old lady. “I meant I partially trust him. He is the nephew of my second husband; you will see him one of these days, I expect, if you remain. I try to think him true. Indeed he must be, for he seems not to care for his own interest.”

“Does he live here?” inquired Alison.

“Who? Hugh Broderick. Yes; that is, his home was in New York, but he spends a great part of his time in Exeford. He,” she laughed shortly, “works in my factory there.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Alison, “just an ordinary workman.”

“Oh, no!” rejoined her grandmother, still chuckling, much diverted apparently by the idea; “Hugh could never do any thing ordinary if he tried. It is true he is what you would, or they would, call a ‘hand,’ but he has a sort of workshop of his own, I believe.”

“And cannot he attend to your interests, then, grandmother?” enquired the girl, more interested yet by the idea of this possible heir to the Broderick property working like a hand in the Exeford Mills.

“I told you,” retorted Mrs. Broderick, “he always thwarts and opposes me. By the way, he ought to be here very soon. It is a month since the last visit.”

Alison would have liked to enquire something further about this, apparently, very independent and disinterested person, yet a sort of instinct told her that Mrs. Broderick was not one to like being questioned, after she had of her-

self dropped a subject, so she remained silent until her grandmother said suddenly:

"I'm going to try you at the marketing. I know Janet Holdsworthy lets them cheat her. It isn't too late yet, and I've an idea you'll get meats cheaper buying them at night."

"I would like to try," said Alison. "But please tell me just what to do."

"No I won't," retorted the old lady. "Because then you might as well be a Chinese for all the good your brains would be to me. But I'll tell you what not to do. That is, not pay one penny more than you can possibly get out of. You have to bargain over everything in this neighborhood."

The prospect was certainly not attractive, but Alison felt it would be a decided relief to be allowed out on errands of the kind, and made haste to say she would do her very best, whereupon Mrs. Broderick sent her for Janet Holdsworthy, and a discussion ensued which enlightened the young girl, more than anything which had gone before, upon her grandmother's avaricious tendencies. As she listened and observed the shrewd, keen look gather force on the withered old face, Alison could not but feel genuine compassion for one whose whole heart, it seemed, was concentrated upon nothing but saving and getting; and this, when the span of life was so nearly over, when youth and all its hopes and joys, its profits, pleasures, or allurements were absolutely gone, and the only real future that in which she would have to give her Creator full account of her earthly stewardship!

Janet, apparently, understood her mistress well. She was respectful, but held her ground when the old lady maintained it was only weak-mindedness on her part

to allow Mr. Crebbs, the butcher, to charge eighteen cents for steak, and Porson, the grocer, twenty-five for butter, etc., etc. The result was as usual: Mrs. Broderick, declaring among them all she would be eaten out of house and home, was compelled to give in to Janet, who declared that she or Miss Alison might as well not bother about the marketing at all, if lower prices were expected. Thoroughly exhausted by the discussion, Mrs. Broderick at last handed Alison two dollars, and instructed Janet, to make out a list of "necessaries" and direct her to the usual shops, after which our heroine flew to put on her hat and gloves to join Janet downstairs, when she indulged in a girlish fit of laughter over the duty she was about to perform.

"And I'll just tell you this, my dear," was Janet's parting injunction, "don't you fash yourself trying to haggle in the shops one bit, for they've all a fixed price, and they just laugh at our wee bit kind of buying, any way! Eh! but it's hard to see her fists so tight, and she, as you may say, just staring her Maker in the face! What good 'll it be doing her there, I'm asking!"

And the good Scotchwoman, who, but for her association with Mrs. Broderick, might have developed some parsimonious ways herself, shook her head solemnly.

Alison took the nice little covered basket from Janet's hands and went out into the summer evening, quite amused and elated by what she had to do, and deciding by all means to take Janet's advice and attempt no haggling over standard prices; but having frequently marketed for Mrs. Gildersleeve the last month of her illness, she had learned how to pick up nice and cheap pieces at the butchers' and hoped to find Mr. Crebbs as obliging as the Benton Place butcher, with whom she had had

most friendly dealings. He proved all smiles and good nature to an evidently new customer, and Alison chose from odds and ends on his counter pieces enough to make an excellent stew, for less than twenty cents, and when some breakfast bacon was added, for ten cents more, she felt quite triumphant, smiling demurely when stout Mr. Crebbs "hoped she'd give him her custom."

"What a pretty creature!" was his wife's exclamation, as Alison's tall, upright young figure, in the trim gray linen gown and dainty little sailor hat, disappeared. "It makes you feel cool and nice to look at her!" and husband and wife spent some time wondering who the young stranger might be.

The neighborhood abounded in shops, in streets running at odd angles from Mrs. Broderick's corner, but the buildings were all old-fashioned like those in Mordick Street, and even where most crowded seemed to be respectably occupied. Alison had concluded her purchases at the grocer's, and was hurrying home, the dark being deeper every instant, when her attention was attracted to a young girl just ahead of her, who was carrying a large bundle under her arm, and seemed about to stagger and fall forward. Alison did not lose an instant in going to her side, thankful she had done so, as the girl turned a face so deathly white and appealing in expression upon her that Alison at once half led, half carried, her into an open door-way evidently leading to the poor young creature's home.

Not a word passed until the stranger was seated on the foot of the narrow staircase of the tenement house; then Alison bent over her, saying anxiously:

"Are you ill? What can I do for you?"

The girl raised her deep, heavily fringed blue eyes to



ALISON AS THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

her new friend's face. They told a story of want, if not of actual physical suffering.

"Yes," she murmured faintly. "I have been ill several days, but I had to go for my work."

"What can I do for you?" urged Alison, glancing around the deserted-looking hall. "Where is your room?"

"Third, back," was the answer, then, very pitifully; "If you could help me up and get me a drink of water, I'd be so much obliged, I am—so—faint."

"Can you wait one moment?" exclaimed Alison. "There is a druggist on the corner, I will get something to revive you."

And leaving her basket in the stranger's keeping, Alison darted around the corner and quickly made her errand known.

The druggist had been speaking to someone behind his prescription desk, and returned after listening to Alison's request, saying to the unseen person:

"This young girl says someone is fainting in the doorway of 104."

"One hundred and four Charlier Street!" was the quick answer. "Who is it?"

The druggist made some inaudible reply; came out to give Alison a reviving dose and receive her ten cents in payment, but the stranger followed the young girl to the door, and as she hastened back to her new friend, he bade the druggist a brief good-evening, adding, "May as well see for myself who is living—or dying—there," and followed her footsteps at a certain distance, entirely unobserved of course by Alison herself.

CHAPTER IX.

THE girl remained just as Alison had left her, and our heroine, feeling a throb of shame as she remembered a fear for the safety of her precious basket, bent all her energies now to inducing the stranger to swallow the ammonia and water, then to allow her to carry the bundle and support her up the stairs. On the third landing Alison's charge directed her now to open the door of a small, nearly bare, wholly cheerless room; but enough of evening light still lingered to see by, while she removed the poor young creature's hat, and helped her into the narrow comfortless bed.

"She needs food," was Alison's reflection, followed quickly by the thought that on this, her first errand for Mrs. Broderick, it would not do to be late. Aloud, she said cheerfully: "I'd like to see you eat something. Is there—have you anyone with you?"

Alison instantly regretted her words. The girl turned her face to the wall, great tears rolled down her wasted cheeks, and covering her face with her hands she sobbed unrestrainedly.

Alison's heart beat with swift strokes of the deepest compassion. There was more than physical suffering here, but what could she do? Never mind! Even at the risk of a scolding from her grandmother, she *would* not, *could* not leave the stranger in such a pitiable condition, and without a word, she slipped out, down into the street, to a *delicatessen* shop she had noticed, where one of her own few coins was quickly exchanged for cold meat,

rolls, butter, and some jelly; with these, she made haste to return, and whether from her air of authority, her gentle insistence, or from the poor girl's really starving condition, it mattered not, but Alison had the satisfaction of seeing her eat what she had brought with the greatest relish.

"And now," said Alison, very cheerfully, "I must be going, or my grandmother will be vexed. But first, won't you tell me your name, and let me come to see you to-morrow?"

The stranger sketched briefly her position. Her mother had been dead just four weeks. She was alone (alas! thought Alison) in New York. After paying her rent nothing remained. Her name was Hilda Benton.

"Don't fear I will not be back, my dear," said Alison, preparing to depart. "See, this is very little, all I can leave with you to-night;" she tucked a silver quarter under the paper covering of the table. "Please don't refuse it! I will surely come in the morning."

Making her adieux as brief as possible, Alison hastened back to Mordick Street, wondering what she ought to do in regard to telling Mrs. Broderick of her adventure. She was satisfied her grandmother would disapprove of anything involving charity, "Yet what could I have done else, in common humanity?" thought Alison. "The girl must surely have fainted from actual starvation! And think of all the Broderick property! I am afraid if I see many more such sights," concluded Alison, with a little smile all to herself, "I'll be as bad as the rest of them—hoping grandmother will leave me some of her fortune."

A final conclusion to tell Janet the story and ask her advice brought her to the basement door of No. 18 when, without an unnecessary word, Mrs. Holdsworthy sent her, basket and all, up to her grandmother's room.

Mrs. Broderick was inclined to receive Alison very crossly, but the latter made haste to display her bargain from Mr. Crebbs and good humor was restored, on how petty, how mean a basis, the girl could not help reflecting.

"I see you have a little sense," was the old lady's way of expressing her satisfaction. "Now take that book." A well-worn account book was indicated. "And enter everything. You have given me the right change? Four cents. Well, add it up—that tells."

Alison very quickly and accurately made up the accounts. The sum total was correct and Mrs. Broderick put away the four cents, apparently satisfied.

"Do as you like to-morrow morning," she said, in bidding Alison good-night; "so long as you are on hand by eleven o'clock."

Alison hastened downstairs, eager to consult Janet about the stranger she had succored, but her enthusiasm was dashed by the very solemn way in which Mrs. Holdsworthy listened and evidently disapproved.

"Oh, my dear," she said gravely, "such doings will never suit her, I'm telling you! No, no; your grandmother'd never hold with anything like that!"

"But Janet, dear Janet," pleaded Alison almost tearfully, "I cannot desert the poor creature like this! I have some money of my own, some clothes even, and—and, I am not," declared the girl, a light springing into her eyes—"I am not going to be turned into a mere machine or a miser or anything of the kind for anybody."

Janet's plain, dark face softened visibly as she looked at the girl before her.

"Eh! but you're more and more like her! my poor little lamb! Every minute!" said the old woman sadly.

"Then, Janet, try to think of me as if I were my mother. Remember, I am her only child, and help me, even in this gloomy old place, to do some good."

But Janet was still unwilling to commend Alison's charitable zeal, and the most she could be brought to say was that she saw no harm, for "this once," in Alison's going in the morning to see Hilda and perhaps doing "a little for her," but after that she begged of the young girl to "let such like alone."

Alison was in her own room by nine o'clock, and for an hour sat in one of the deep, old-fashioned windows, gazing out upon the darkling street where people still came and went, and lingered on their doorsteps, loath to exchange the cool starlight for heated rooms within. How much seemed to have happened since the night before! How suddenly her whole life had changed! And with the easy adaptability of youth, and an elastic temperament, Alison felt as though she was already initiated into the ways and methods of this new, and entirely novel, kind of existence. That it would prove a bondage in many ways she felt distinctly certain, and yet she resolved, if possible, to combat any of the mean influences at work, lest they should taint her own nature. Her very prayers, before she slept that night, included an humble petition that she be not injured by it all; but Alison was too entirely unversed in worldly wisdom or judgment to know how deteriorating could be even the social side of her new associations; indeed she fell asleep wondering how soon Mrs. Tom Parkinson, and "the rest of them," would call at Mordick Street; above all, how soon that apparently contumacious young man, Hugh Broderick, would put in an appearance.

CHAPTER X.

OUR heroine was up early the next morning and swallowed her breakfast of bread, oatmeal, and coffee, in great haste, so anxious was she to be again in Charlier Street and see how matters fared with Hilda. Janet knew the building—in fact, it belonged to the Broderick estate—and was satisfied if its occupants were of the very humblest they were respectable, and no harm could come of Alison's going there "this once."

"But mind me, my dear," pleaded Mrs. Holdsworthy; "don't get in for doing any more. Your grandmother would rise up out of her bed if she knew it!"

Alison departed, much disconcerted by Janet's warning, for she was too honorable not to feel aware that in secretly acting in a manner she knew her grandmother would disapprove she would be doing wrong while under her roof and living on her bounty; and her spirit of independence, rather too great for a girl of her years, if the truth were known, asserted itself and made her regard what had seemed but yesterday good fortune, as an irksome bondage.

It was pleasant, however, to find such a bright welcome from Hilda, who, still pale and languid, was trying to work, and had made her little room as neat and cheerful as possible, in expectation of her unknown friend. Seen by daylight, the young girl looked to be about twenty-three, and would have been attractive in appearance, Alison decided, if she had been in good health. Her eyes were very lovely, her profuse hair the sort of blond seen generally only in

children; the features delicate, mobile, refined. Indeed there was something more than commonly interesting about her, as well as a tinge of something foreign both in look and accent, the latter barely perceptible and puzzling to Alison until Hilda explained that she had spent the years of her childhood in Germany, with relatives of her father; at his death two years ago, she had begun a hard struggle under which her mother at last succumbed, leaving the poor girl almost destitute and wholly alone.

"For you see," said Hilda, whose cheeks had flushed while she was speaking, "mother and I never cared to make many friends; where we had to live the people were mostly rough and common, so we kept always to ourselves, and now she is gone I have no one."

"Oh, I am so sorry," exclaimed Alison, deeply in sympathy. "But, Hilda, are you making gloves?"

"I learned my trade, badly enough, when mother was ill," said the young girl, with a sigh. "But a lady in the shop where I get work has told me if I could get away to one of the towns where they have large factories, I might do well. She spoke of a place called Exeford."

"Exeford!" exclaimed Alison, but in the same breath she hesitated. How could she hope to interest Mrs. Broderick in her new friend? Still she would not give up an effort, and added cheerfully:

"I know something about Exeford, and will find out more to-day. Now I must hurry back, and, Hilda, it's nothing much to offer you, but please take this." Alison laid a one-dollar bill on the table. "And promise me you will get some food. I will certainly see you soon again."

Tears sprang into Hilda's eyes. For an instant she could not speak, but she contrived to make Alison understand her gratitude, and the latter went away determined,

now that she knew Hilda's trade, to do something which might really be of service to the girl, although just how to set about it was hard to tell.

An hour of liberty remained, and Alison made use of it by calling at Mrs. Norton's and giving as encouraging an account as she could of her grandmother's household, but refraining from, as yet, extending any invitation. When she mentioned Mrs. Parkinson, Mrs. Norton became quite animated. If it was the same, she was sure Alison would find her very nice. "So lively and sociable," was Mrs. Norton's way of describing her. "She had our parlor here once," Mrs. Norton concluded; "and she was just the life of the house."

Alison came away not quite knowing whether Mrs. Norton's description sounded hopeful or not, since, kind-hearted as she was, that lady's idea of sociability and liveliness was something rather too boisterous to be always agreeable, and our heroine could not help wondering, also, how such characteristics were tolerated in No. 18 Mordick Street! However, as it would seem that her sole hope of companionship, just at present, rested in the Broderick connection, there was nothing to do but hope and expect the best.

She laid aside her hat and gloves as soon as she went in, and as eleven o'clock was sounding made her way to her grandmother's room.

The sharp voice, already familiar, bade her "Come in," and directly Alison opened the door, she saw that Mrs. Broderick was not alone.

A gentleman, a man perhaps thirty years of age, with a rather thin dark face, well dressed, but not foppish, and having an expression half humorous, half cynical in its intent, was seated in the deep easy chair by the window.

He was leaning slightly forward, apparently in the midst of a discussion with the old lady, and by a quick contraction of his brows showed annoyance at the interruption. But as Alison stood perfectly still after one single glance in his direction, Mrs. Broderick's sharp voice sounded:

"Come in, Alison! Don't stand over there! Hugh," to the visitor, who had risen and was looking critically at Alison's slim upright figure, and half averted face, "this is my granddaughter, Alison Fane—my nephew Hugh Broderick, Alison. I told you," concluded the old lady leaning back again, "he would be here soon, and come to quarrel, as usual!"

CHAPTER XI.

HUGH BRODERICK stood still for a moment, even after he had slowly released the cool little fingers Alison had placed in his outstretched palm; for his surprise, he called it, was baffling, almost disconcerting to him. He was in something of the same frame of mind, perhaps, as Ferdinand on the Enchanted Isle, when he met Miranda; only here was a very decidedly nineteenth century room, totally unromantic in its elements, and the pair of soft dark-fringed gray eyes, looking straight into his brown ones, were those of a purely flesh-and-blood young creature, who had a provoking sort of dimple in her cheek, a dainty little charm giving a hint of what the smile, the soft laughter of the girl would be. So far in his life, at least for the past eight years, he had given little heed to the other sex, except in their capacity as glove-makers and bread-winners, whose rights and wrongs he attended to in a partly philanthropic but purely businesslike fashion. He would never have been what he was, had there not been a time when softer sentiments were possible, but all that was so long ago that the queer thrill which tingled in the man's veins as he held this girl's soft fingers for an instant in his hand, and gazed down into the fine, intensely pure, if spirited young face, annoyed as well as perplexed him.

Well, here was a chance perhaps for a bit of the character study he enjoyed.

Mrs. Broderick's sharp voice broke the significant

silence. "Well, have you two met before, that you have nothing new to say?"

Alison colored swiftly and drew back, while Broderick said, with his shrewd smile:

"We were almost at a decision. I—well, yes—I think somewhere, Miss Alison, we have met."

The girl laughed gently. "Yes, perhaps"—she had seated herself near the old desk and rested her cheek on her hand, quite unconcernedly looking at the visitor. "Isn't it a German theory, that of pre-existence?"

"Pre-fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Mrs. Broderick. "If you and Hugh Broderick are going to talk nonsense of that kind, please ring for Janet to take me away. I never could see how people couldn't content themselves with what was before their eyes without wondering and bothering about 'the might be.'"

Broderick thought the present satisfactory enough, but only smiled again, and presently the old lady renewed the subject they had been discussing when Alison entered.

"I don't like the way things are going on at all," said the old lady. "Whether Gorman's at fault or some of his people, there's an air of, well——"

Broderick's keen face darkened. He rose and walked over to the mantel, where he stood looking intently, anxiously upon the withered but eager old face and figure in the great arm-chair.

"There's an air of grasping, of pushing work and workmen," he said quickly, "which no one understands better than I do! One thing which brought me to New York was to investigate some of the new-fangled appliances Gorman is using, and also to consult a friend, up in such things, about my own work."

"Your own? Oh!" Mrs. Broderick's lips curled. "That precious invention of yours, I suppose!"

The young man humored her with his smile.

"Exactly. How do you know, Aunt Rachel, but that some day I may set up an opposition factory, and drive Gorman's out of the field!"

"Humph! I don't doubt you'd do it, just to show your power! that is, if you could."

"Precisely; we all like power. Possibly I am fonder of it than most people. However I'll do fairly by you, and not even be too hard on Gorman."

"Oh, Gorman! Precious little I care for him! I'm going to have the whole affair carefully examined. I'd have you do it," snapped the old lady, "only you'd blunder."

"Blunder?"

"Yes, you'd do some headstrong thing or other, that would spoil everything—knock someone down on suspicion."

"Oh, no!" said Broderick quietly, but with a look in his eyes which made Alison think that to see him angry would not be pleasant, and to have his anger directed at one would be decidedly uncomfortable. "I'd prove my doubt, and then knock them down, very effectually."

Mrs. Broderick watched her visitor an instant, in silence.

"The Parkinson tribe one and all will pay their respects very soon," she said at last. It afforded the old lady unmixed delight to discuss affairs, both business and personal, with her husband's nephew. Independent, aggressive, as he undoubtedly was, his opinions were always fearless, and generally so perfectly unbiassed as to be both valuable and amusing.

"They still hunt in couples, then?" he observed, leaning forward, toying with a paper cutter, his hands between his knees, his handsome, critical eyes lifted to the old lady's.

She nodded and smiled grimly. "Exactly! It will make them wild to find her,"—indicating Alison—"established here!"

Broderick still continued to balance the paper knife, but just turned his eyes with a new light, a gleam of fun in them, upon Alison, who felt that quick sense of response.

"Be easy on then all, Miss Alison," he advised.

"You can let Donald Fane's daughter alone for that!" said Mrs. Broderick. "But she'll see very little of them, I mean to send her down to New Jersey on an errand. They never stay long, that's one good thing. Whether they are afraid of being starved, or quarrelling among themselves, I can't tell, but something takes them away."

"Will the Leighs come?" Broderick enquired in an altered voice.

The old lady's glance softened.

"I—I'd almost ask them," she said gently. Presently, she added:

"Jack doing anything?"

"Oh! Well, yes; a little," said Broderick. "He isn't looking well—fagged, I thought, the other day; but he is talking of renovating part of the old house, and sending on some curious bits of carving to the World's Fair."

Mrs. Broderick was silent for an instant. Evidently the questions and answers were important, and Alison found herself curious to understand all they implied, and at the same time felt convinced she would be enlightened, doubtless by Hugh Broderick, if not by her grandmother herself.

"Then he can't be losing money," the old lady said presently, "and I suppose that silly wife of his is fond of spending, as usual."

Broderick only nodded. "She is good-hearted," he said, after a moment's reflection. "If her way of giving charity was a trifle more well balanced, she would be a God-send in lower Exeford."

"Balanced!" Mrs. Broderick's eyes flashed. "Did you ever hear of a Martinville with any balance?"

"Yes, old Toby," said Hugh promptly; "in so far as letting his right hand at once into the occupations of his left. That's harmony any way, isn't it?"

"Hugh!" said Mrs. Broderick, with a short laugh, "what made you take to glove-making, is more than I can account for."

He smiled. "It's a means to an end," Broderick returned, with a half shrug of his shoulders.

"There!" exclaimed his hostess sharply; "you say it all—what everything is with you, I verily believe! Even your coming here, your—well, putting up with my crochety ways, my suspiciousness, it's all just one and the same thing."

The man's dark face changed color, and a look of infinite compassion, if not tenderness, came into his eyes.

"Have you ever found me—well, self-seeking—Aunt Rachel, in coming to see you?" he asked gravely.

Her thin, colorless lips quivered.

"No," she said shortly. "No, I haven't; there!"

"All ends, as you call them," he continued, speaking more rapidly and apparently forgetting even Alison's presence, "are not of necessity selfish. How often have I urged you to let me make you more comfortable; to see

you in a different way of living; you—some day this sort of thing,” he glanced contemptuously about him, “will wear your body out as it——”

She interrupted him.

“As it has my heart? Eh, Hugh?”

He scarcely hesitated, and yet there was a brief silence.

“Very nearly,” he said gravely. Mrs. Broderick evidently roused herself to speak in a tone of composure.

“It is nearly over,” she said slowly. “A long journey, the foot of the hill is nearly reached! I have your hand, my dear, thank God, at the last—haven’t I, Hugh?”

He started forward and took the trembling fingers with their flashing jewels in his own strong young grasp.

“Aunt Rachel!” he exclaimed brightly, “this is a poor way for me to let you talk of yourself! Why, there are years of life and activity in you yet, and, if you’d even try a journey up to Exeford yourself, it would do you worlds of good, you’d be received——”

The flush of pleasure his words had brought to her withered cheek, the soft look in her dim eyes, gave way again to the chill expression which seemed her most natural one.

“I’d be received,” she said, “in a fawning way by old Gorman, and by the toilers in the mills—how, Hugh, if they knew I was really their owner?”

His eyes did not waver in their intense look upon her face with its chilling exterior. “You would see their needs, realize what your money could do for them.”

“No,” she said slowly, almost dreamily. “I leave that, I am leaving it, to those who, perhaps, can and will do that for me.”

There was another one of those deeply significant silences, and Alison felt herself drawn more and more into the spirit of the subject under discussion. Exeford with its great mills, throbbing arteries of life and activity, its rush and bustle, eager ebb and flow, its constant push for power, for gain, seemed near and real as a living presence; and the grave composed profile she was watching, as Broderick gazed ahead of him, was like some central dominating power, although, as well she knew, he was only her grandmother's foreman, not even agent; yet the idea of servitude in an ignoble sense was so far removed from anything this man suggested that she could fancy him giving power and character, individuality and new meaning, to the poorest, humblest avocation. Somehow the thought of him in the midst of wonders, in the mechanical world—guiding, directing, inventing—seemed fitting. He might smile in that lazy, humorous fashion, his eyes might hold their gleam of fun and satire, his voice that soft caressing accent; yet what was the deeper meaning of his nature? That first clasp of his hand, firm, yet gentle, had expressed it.

Hugh Broderick stood up suddenly. "I have to be off, Aunt Rachel," he said, rousing himself from a fit of abstraction; he, too, had been subjecting certain influences to analysis. "I will be back in an hour or two." He glanced at Alison. "By the way, Miss Fane, haven't you an hour or two to spare? I'd like," he continued, glancing at Mrs. Broderick, "to take her out for a sail somewhere. There are boats going everywhere just now, are there not?"

Alison's eyes sparkled.

Mrs. Broderick laughed almost aloud.

"I declare, Hugh," she exclaimed, "you are your father

all over again! He was always ready for a holiday as he called it!"

"I've earned it lately," he observed.

Mrs. Broderick nodded her head.

"Well, child," she said, looking keenly at Alison, "go, if you wish to. You needn't be afraid of Hugh Broderick, he will take excellent care of you."

CHAPTER XII.

ALISON needed no second bidding. The prospect of a trip somewhere with Broderick was especially delightful, since it would afford her a chance to discuss Exeford with a person who, of course, knew it thoroughly, and Alison had a scheme already unfolding itself in her brain. Janet's advice might be, and was no doubt valuable on some points. On this no one, she felt sure, could guide her better than Mr. Broderick. In any case no harm could come of confiding in him.

It was a pleasure to fly to Janet with her good news; to have that old lady's assistance, advice, and commendation, in the matter of her toilet; her complete approval of the cool, fresh looking black-and-white muslin, the lace scarf and hat with its trimming of lace, blue-bells, and daisies; altogether as pretty, becoming, and tasteful a costume as any girl of fashion might have desired, probably costing about the price of such a one's last caprice in boots or parasol! Whether or not Broderick was a man who understood details in such matters, the whole effect it was clearly to be seen pleased him; the grave dark eyes lighted quickly as Alison reappeared, and swept her girlish figure with an inclusive glance; and if it rested a moment longer on the fair young face, small wonder—since such sights formed little part of the man's dull, daily life. "Now then," Broderick exclaimed, when they were at last outside the door, a sense of release, almost of escape, affecting Alison, and stimulating her at once; "if you will put yourself in my hands, Miss Fane, I fancy I can give you

a pleasant morning. Let me see! Yes, we will take a downtown boat."

It was all novel, all interesting to Alison; the hour was one not over crowded, and very soon she found herself most comfortably ensconced on the deck of the *White Wings*, a large steamboat plying up and down between the great crowded city and the beach, where Broderick said they could roam about, see the various sights, dine, and come back pleasantly in the cool of the evening.

"And I shall only ask one thing for myself," he said, looking down half quizzically at her. "I want you to tell me how and what you are doing at Mordick Street; better still, what you intend to do?"

Alison's whole expression altered from its look of serene contentment so swiftly that Broderick added hastily:

"No, not a word now! Wait, let us just enjoy the sail! Later on I'll find a nice spot on the beach where I can listen and you can tell me everything."

"But now, at once," said Alison eagerly, "you can give me some idea of what Exeford is like."

He looked at her in surprise. "Do you contemplate visiting us?" he asked, smiling.

"I—perhaps, how can I tell? There! Come, Mr. Bröderick, why should I hesitate to tell you the main reason I at first," she hesitated, flushed, but hurried on, "wanted a good *tête-à-tête* with you? I intend to—make gloves!"

He looked at her with incredulity; then seeing the grave composure of her expression, put back his head and laughed quietly.

"You!" he said at last, scrutinizing the fair young face curiously. "What ever suggested it?"

"A friend; well, someone I am interested in," returned Alison promptly. She related what she knew of Hilda Benton; her history so far as the young woman had given its facts to her. Broderick listened with deep attention.

"So!" he exclaimed at last, the familiar German exclamation sounding natural enough to Alison. "If she is at all experienced in these foreign methods she might easily obtain work, for in fact hands of that kind are always sought for. But for yourself, do you know how hard it would be to learn even the rudiments of the trade, and what your pay would be?"

"I know, or at least," said the girl, "I have thought of all that. Still, it would be only servitude of another kind," she added in a lower tone, and gazing away from him out on to the water, "and decidedly more elevating."

Broderick had now the key to the difficulty. It was by no means improbable that the life of this young girl, in such a house as the one they had just quitted, with such a one as Mrs. Broderick for its mistress, could be far more slavish, irksome, dependent, than that of the humblest bread-winner in all Exeford, and while the scheme still impressed him as entirely impractical, he could not help admiring the independence and resolution which had suggested it to her mind. But could she not do something better fitted to her activity of heart and brain?

"I know you of course too little, yet, to advise," he said finally, not releasing her from that quiet scrutiny, but with a softer look in his eyes. "But, no, I will not say anything, except that unless you have your grandmother's sanction, her approval, I will attempt nothing. With that, I will do all in my power to aid your strange impulse."

She looked up gratefully at him, and said quickly:

"What is there strange in my wishing to do what

dozens of other girls and women are doing? It speaks anything but well for your mills."

His brows contracted. "For Heaven's sake," he exclaimed, "don't call them mine! And I don't wish, don't mean to speak well of them! If I thought," he added quickly, and turning upon her something of the same look which had flashed into his eyes when her grandmother was speaking of business affairs, "your going there as a worker would solve some of the problems I'm tormented with, I'd bid you God speed as on a holy enterprise; but, no—at least, wait!"

The word, the look, was imperative, and Alison was forced to be content. But there was too much that was pleasurable in her position, their surroundings, to care for much else, and presently she and Broderick were talking like old friends, and after an all too short sail, there was the ride in the car, and at last a delightful walk on the beach, where he made her very comfortable with rugs and huge umbrellas, hired from one of the innumerable vendors of the same who plied a variety of trades from candy-selling to instantaneous photography.

The day was delightful, the spot sufficiently secluded, the very sense of numbers in the figures moving to and fro, or grouped on the sands, gave to our friends a sense of seclusion which encouraged confidences, and Broderick was almost startled, later, to find how much of what was the present purpose, the ambition of his life, he had laid before this almost stranger, this young unversed girl. But her very eyes, her closed sweet lips, compelled him; her look was all interest, comprehension, everything expressed what Alison felt, and, to her own perplexity, intense sympathy, interest, comprehension.

"No," he said once, in answer to a question she put, "I

will admit I am not altogether happy in the life I am leading. Don't mistake me! There is something much more to be gotten out of life, and perhaps I may have a share of it, some day, but meanwhile the mill offers me my best chance. I am working out what may prove a successful invention; in any case I can test, and prove, my powers—and the contact with my fellow-man, and working companions, has so far not narrowed me, at least rather given me a smaller opinion of myself, a wider one of humanity at large.”

“But,” urged Alison, glancing at his well-built alert figure, his keen eyes, and grave strong face. “How will it be if success does come? You may find you have stunted yourself beyond growing powers.”

He gazed down into the soft girlish face of the speaker eagerly, yet in fresh surprise. Where had this girl come by her wisdom?

“You are right, I think of that often,” he said, in a moment. “And yet the very fact of working among so many other lives, keeps me free from that kind of dross. However,” his sombre eyes lighted, “I will not forget your counsels. Believe me, in my world I have need of some such clear-seeing mentor. I can hardly tell you what life up there seems at times.”

“But will you not try?” she urged. “I want so much to know more of it! Who, for instance, are my grandmother's relations?”

Broderick laughed. “No, no, that is beyond me! But you are sure to see them all soon. They must be due on their regulation visit. By the way, don't you think I've earned the right to do a little catechizing myself? Surely, your world must seem cramped just now.”

“No,” said the girl, with that peculiar lifting of her

head, the look which gave an impression of force, coming into her eyes and lips. "On the contrary, it seems widening. At the Nortons', after my cousin's death, for a time, yes, it seemed as if the outlook might be of something insupportable. I know I'm naturally a home bird, and like one kind of small routine, but I should stifle were I to lead the life I am sure some excellent, happy, and certainly useful people find their sphere in. I want——"

The girl paused. She leaned forward, and met his glance sadly.

"What you will not find, my friend," Hugh Broderick said gravely, "I am sure, without pain, sorrow, disappointment! I know well, I can read, something of your nature; perhaps," he smiled rather sadly, "by my own. Believe me, this world, if it gives supreme moments of happiness, to such as you and me gives its hours of pain, vexation, hollowness, disenchantment, until we learn that it is all involved in the one grand lesson of life—the Book, which the only Master worth serving holds open."

Alison's eyes fell. Not a trace of cant was there in the man's tone; his manner, his voice, however, all impressed her, quieted her, yet there was more to say on the same topic, and Alison, lifting her eyes with their sad look, went on anxiously: "I know it may seem queer to talk to you in this way, Mr. Broderick, but life is such a tangle! And I do pray," her lips quivered, but he only nodded his head gravely, and she continued: "And I ask for light and strength, and I want, oh, so much to make all this natural energy and spirit of mine of use. Mrs. Gildersleeve, after all, did need me. Even the Nortons found me of some service, but with my grandmother I feel myself merely an encumbrance. I have an idea that up in that great,

busy, working world, if a mere unit, I could make out the sum total, with better results!"

He laughed. "And yet," he said, looking at the girl intently, "there's not a touch of the 'woman—woman' about you, as it is called, you know."

"Heaven forbid!" she laughed, "and yet, what did I say, or did I say it? Like yourself, but in a different field, I'd like power."

"Ah, power! A woman has it, my friend, in the hollow of her hand but too often."

"And uses it——" Alison hesitated.

"To crush, or wound and maim. But no! power is not, should not be despised, and—see here—I am going to prove that you already possess a certain, perhaps undue, amount; for here is a concession on my part. If you like, when we go back, this very evening, I will say something to commend your plan to Mrs. Broderick. I think," he added quietly, "I know of an argument which may be all-potent, but it may tax you beyond your strength."

"Try me!" exclaimed Alison. She held out her hand, he took it at once, and as the girl gave that little decisive nod to her head characteristic of determination within her, he smiled upon their compact.

"If you fail," he said, as she withdrew her hand, "remember I do not urge, indeed I am not sure that, in any way, I advise nor will I encourage it."

But Alison had gained her point, and whatever the future held she believed, she hoped, Hugh Broderick would prove if a rigid master, at least a loyal friend.

CHAPTER XIII.

It had been a day of unusual activity for Mrs. Broderick; yet, as in all matters of her daily life, the result of careful deliberation, thought, and some consultation with the faithful Janet.

A look in her mistress' face, when she carried up the early dinner tray, had surprised the old housekeeper; but before a question was asked, Mrs. Broderick said dryly:

"Your face hasn't lost its tell-tale powers, my good Janet! You've as much as asked me what is the matter."

Janet smiled gravely and nodded. "That's so, ma'am," she said calmly.

"Well, I've been thinking considerably," said her mistress, "and I've made my mind up on a point or two. Hugh Broderick, as usual, has made me go into details, to think—worry—— Now, will you be kind enough to send for a messenger boy at once? Meanwhile, give me my desk." Janet obeyed, too accustomed to the old lady's energy in business matters to even think much of her apparent eagerness in this affair, whatever it might mean in the present or future. The lap desk was easily arranged; the note written, sealed, and addressed before the boy sent for arrived, and on being ushered into Mrs. Broderick's presence, she looked at him keenly, made a note of his number, and enjoined upon him to find the gentleman to whom the letter was addressed wherever he was, if in New York; and if not, to get his out of town address.

Janet added a word of warning, to speed the boy on this evidently important mission, and he departed impressed by the fact that it "meant business," and would afford him an opportunity for his rare executive talents to come forward. Two o'clock, to Janet's surprise, saw his return, flushed with triumph after, as he made haste to explain, a "regular hunt, the party'd moved, but said it was all right, he'd be up *directly*." And pocketing his own *douceur*, No. 40005 departed just as the "party" he had summoned, a slightly built man of middle age with a quiet, clerical aspect, approached Mordick Street and, somewhat anxious in manner, knocked at No. 18.

"Well, Mr. Robbins!" exclaimed Janet, "you're a great stranger! You'll find her failing rather," she added in a whisper and motioning him toward the stairs. "I feel as if—well any day, anything might happen."

The little man nodded gravely, understanding precisely what Mrs. Holdsworthy meant—sighed, dusted his hat, straightened his collar and tie, from force of habit, for it was in absolutely good order, and followed the old woman slowly up the staircase.

Dearly would Janet have liked to caution her mistress against anything worrying, but Mrs. Broderick's look of eagerness and determination made it out of the question, and she retired, obliged to content herself by one warning shake of her head over the little man's shoulder, which Mrs. Broderick refused to admit that she observed; if anything, it only made her keener over the matter in hand. That look of her old servant emphasized what she felt daily, almost hourly, sure of: that, as she had said, the end was drawing near.

An hour elapsed before Janet was summoned by her mistress' bell, to find her very pale, but comparatively

composed and certainly much better than she had expected would be the case after any exertion on one of her poorest days.

"You're wanted as a witness, Janet," the old lady said gravely, "and there must be no misunderstanding that you see me in full possession of my senses. Now go and call in that Mrs. Joyce who lives two doors below, to act as a second witness."

Janet very soberly listened, did her bidding, and returned in a few minutes with Mrs. Joyce, whom Mrs. Broderick recognized by a short nod of the head. Janet waited with an enquiring glance at Mr. Robbins.

"Stay a little longer," said the old lady, in her sharp tone; she drew the checkbook, familiar to Janet's eyes, nearer. "Now then, you are to understand, Janet, Mr. Robbins receives this check to hold the money, seven hundred and fifty dollars, in trust for a certain purpose."

The check was signed. Irregular or unusual the proceeding might appear in a court of law, but to Janet Holdsworthy it seemed as important, as binding, as sacred, as though registered before Heaven, and when once again to another document her signature, and that of Mrs. Joyce, as witness to that of her mistress were required, after which she was allowed to show her neighbor out and return to her own domain, the sense that such transactions just now must mean something of unusual importance fairly overawed the old Scotchwoman, so that while she waited upon Mr. Robbins with a light refreshment before that gentleman took his leave, she did her best to "draw him out," but with no success; the only suggestion offered by what he said being the result of his enquiring about "this young lady, Miss Fane—Donald's daughter, he understood."

Janet might have launched forth freely on so congenial a topic, but that the lawyer's manner had annoyed her. "If he can keep mum, so can I," the old woman reflected, with a toss of her head, and Mr. Robbins departed, no wiser, so far as this point was concerned, than when he came, yet considerably impressed by the fact that Mrs. Broderick was failing, "going fast," he told his wife that evening. "But she's as wide awake this minute as you and I ever were—and a bit wider maybe."

Had he known, however, the effort, mental and physical powers taxed to their uttermost, which had made the morning's work possible to the old lady in Mordick Street, Mr. Robbins' admiration of her pluck would have been even greater than it was. The moments seemed to her to drag after his departure, anxiety for Alison's return increasing, until when at last the hour really came which saw Broderick and Alison once more in the door-way, the old lady had become feverishly weak, and would have been very querulous, but that the sight of Broderick's face recalled to her the need of a perfectly quiet, composed, and satisfactory interview with him.

And something in Alison's face, manner, even her voice, also surprised the old lady into forgetting any personal grievance. The girl looked almost beautiful: her eyes darker, softer, gentler; the color, usually only flitting, now a deep pink on her cheeks; her lips, red as a child's, were parted in such a softly happy smile, as she came in, her voice held so unmistakable a ring of happiness that, as she withdrew, leaving Broderick alone with his old kinswoman, the latter turned her shrewd glance upon him, saying quietly:

"She—what has happened? The girl is waking up into—she may turn out a beautiful woman."

Broderick smiled quietly.

"Undoubtedly!" he remarked. "No girl with such a pair of eyes, such an expressive face, could ever be plain; and this Miss Fane has what artists would rave over: the combination of childlike simplicity with a woman's strength and sweetness."

"Humph! you've been using your powers of discernment to some purpose, I see."

"I told you, my dear aunt," said Broderick lightly, but passing his hand across his brow, as if weary, "I am always doing it, nowadays."

She looked at him keenly, her old eyes full of affectionate sorrow.

"Hugh," she said quietly, "will the old wound never heal? Do you know, I *had* hoped—yes, worldly, cynical, as you think me, as in most ways I am—this very day I had been wishing things were different, and that you and this girl of poor Donald's——"

He started, flushed almost painfully, and put up his hand.

"No, no, my dear Aunt Rachel!" he said quickly. "Dismiss all such ideas once, and forever, from your mind! I am wedded hand and foot, strength and purpose, time—in every way—simply to work; to carrying out certain schemes, to enjoying a wider life, perhaps of travel, and study later. But, as for one thought of marriage, I shall never have it. Yes, or rather no; the old wound, as you call it, not only has not healed, but is sore with itself, it has eaten its way through and through all the heart I could ever offer any girl or woman upon earth."

He spoke deliberately, slowly, yet with a force that made each word impressive, and presently went on:

"This young girl, Alison Fane, may have a happy life before her, but it must be an active one. In fact," he smiled, recalling the subject of their discussion that day, "she has already mentioned some of her plans, and requested me to use my influence with you."

"Indeed! Then you must have made some progress," declared Mrs. Broderick, a faint smile touching her lips.

"Oh, it was, as you will see, because I could help her with advice, it being in my own line. She is seriously anxious to make gloves."

"To what?" Mrs. Broderick sat upright, both hands pressed firmly down upon the arms of her great chair. "Alison wishes to make gloves!"

He nodded slowly. "Yes, and let me assure you her ideas are very practical. Indeed, were she anyone else, I would consider her a most valuable apprentice."

Mrs. Broderick remained silent, but every moment was full of keenest thought.

"Why anyone else?" she asked at length, with another piercing gaze.

"Oh, simply because you might not care to have it known your granddaughter was working in the mills."

"Humph! why, you—well, but why need they know it?"

He laughed. "Do you——" But suddenly he broke off. "That is very true," he continued. "She is so entirely a stranger that the ordinary mill hands need not know it; still, no, I do not like the idea! But am I to understand, then, that you do not wholly disapprove?"

"You think well of it?" She watched him critically.

"I promised her to use my influence."

"And if you did not think it a good idea, Hugh

Broderick, you would not have done so. Why can't you admit as much?"

"But I really do not know," he said after a brief pause, and with a look of keen anxiety. "She is not a girl whom one could advise carelessly,—I fancy she has keenest intuitions and good natural judgment, but how much does she know of the world?"

"That is not the question," retorted Mrs. Broderick. "Exeford is a perfectly moral, humdrum town. She will not be contaminated." A long pause ensued. Broderick was evidently deep in thought, and his old kinswoman had shaded her eyes with one jewelled hand.

"Donald Fane's daughter!" she said at last, the same melancholy smile flickering about her lips. "This is a queer world, Hugh! I'm not sorry to leave it, and yet, I admit, I'd like to stay a little longer, to watch that girl work out her destiny! There! You would add, under Providence, and so, so I hope do I—I assure you, my dear boy, I'm not quite the hardened sceptic you believe me."

"I know it," he smiled. "You never really were. It was like some of your other fads."

"Well, well!" she rejoined hastily, "this is not the subject in hand exactly. Yes, Hugh, I'm amenable to your authority yet, you see, and I will agree to consider this astonishing proposition of Alison's seriously. I will discuss it with her, and now let us see what we can do with Gorman's latest suggestion. He wants me to use the Clyde machines, I understand."

And the conversation drifted speedily into the business questions just then agitating the management and operatives of "Gorman's" in Exeford, and Hugh apparently forgot everything else they had been considering in setting before his kinswoman certain of the rights and

wrongs of the matters under way, in no degree giving in to her in any argument which shut out full consideration of the workers, but at the same time impressing upon her the fact that he never humored them.

"It is only and always a question of fair exchange," he declared. "But at the same time, those who are in power should remember that the working people have rights, which perhaps they dare not express, and it is the master's duty to see to them. Not to sentimentalize a grievance, but to sift it, settle it—in fact, co-operate."

Mrs. Broderick's eyes were still watchful and alert. "Suppose," she said quietly, "that Exeford mills were yours."

He understood her thoroughly. "I should consider," he said quietly, "that by holding them I was defrauding those to whom by every moral right they belong."

"Property has no moral rights, such as you suggest," declared Mrs. Broderick, with a flash of her wonderful dark eyes. "And you of all people to advocate the entirely unjust idea of mere birthright!"

Broderick's fine keen face lit up with a very shrewd smile.

"My dear Aunt Rachel," he said, leaning his arm across the back of his chair and looking at her steadily, "why is it that all our talks, begun on business, drift into theoretical discussions? Either we have an immense respect for each other's private opinions, or we must see reason for urging a conversion to our own! Now, I admit in the most wholesale manner that I want to convert you, but you persist in my posing as what I am not, never was, never could be—a believer in that universal brotherhood which demands common ownership of the universe! I protect my rights, moral, mental, physical, in every pos-

sible way, against any enemy, but I protect, or *wish* to protect my brother, who is my common sharer in toil, the necessary, or part of the necessary mechanism of my success. That is all: if I have a tool, shall I not keep it clean? A lock; shall I not see that the key fits it and is never clogged?"

"Go on," she assented, with her grim smile.

"There is very little more to say; this was just in answer to your idea that I could advocate common ownership in property, of any kind. But I do maintain, remember, that birth has certain rights. One should think of one's own, first, in these matters, at least so far as to give them their chance. I would never beggar my son to enrich my neighbor, unless that son of himself had disgraced his title to my name or consideration. Now, have I made what you consider my alarmingly socialistic doctrines clear?"

She waited in careful silence a moment and more before answering.

"Yes," she said at length, "I understand you. I must, I will be just, if I can, before it is too late."

"You are right," he said slowly. "I have seen enough of the world to despise its delays, based on that most cowardly, unworthy dread of the only thing of which we are certain—death. By the way, my will is made, and actually largely in your favor!"

"Hugh Broderick, talk sense if you can," said his listener, trying not to smile.

"But I am, my dear aunt!" he retorted gayly. "Should you outlive me, you are left full right and title to the wonderful 'attachment,' provided you have it used as I direct. You may yet ride in a golden chariot, perhaps, at my expense!"

He was standing over her, and with one of his rare impulses of demonstration, curiously enough, most frequent with this lonely, forbidding old woman, laid his hand on her head and smiled down upon her, gently touching her forehead with his lips.

"Hugh, my lad," Mrs. Broderick said, in a low tone, "if you had been my boy, my own child, you'd have warmed my heart, and made a different woman of me! Never mind! You will see, when I am gone!"

He laid his hand lightly on her lips.

"Not a word more!" he said, in a low tone. "Now, Aunt Rachel, business over——"

"To pleasure," she assented. "Where is Alison? Janet tells me she can play or sing, something of the kind. The old piano downstairs may be worth opening."

CHAPTER XIV.

ALISON FANE opened her eyes the next morning with that sudden rush of recollection which comes after an engrossing day, such as the last had been, coupled with a confused consciousness of something else impending, and then, with a smile at herself, remembered that Mr. Broderick was to leave on a very early train, and she had actually been commissioned by her grandmother to breakfast with him in the seldom used dining-room. She had to laugh to herself as she made her toilet, and went down the shabby old stairs, wondering whether there would be breakfast enough for one, to say nothing of two, but her first glance at Janet's kitchen reassured her. Preparations for something quite worthy to be called a meal were going forward, and Janet's first salutation showed the old woman to be in a state of triumphant pride.

"Now go yourself, my dear, into the dining-room and see how I've set things out!" said Mrs. Holdsworthy. "I'd hard work to make your grandmother let me have out the best. Eh! but he's the only one she'd do it for!"

Alison was only too well pleased to follow the suggestion, and found the freshly laid table, with the really rich damask and silver which hinted at her grandmother's treasures of the kind, made a cheerful centre in a very gloomy, although imposing room. It was but the work of a few moments to manage quite a pretty little bouquet from the uncared for garden, and Alison was in the midst

of this work, having just placed her blossoms in a bowl of creamy white ware she had discovered in the cupboard, when the door opened upon Broderick himself. He looked cool and composed as usual, but with the twinkle in his eye Alison already knew, and which she answered at once by a smile and gay nod of her head.

"Am I intruding? No—well, then, may I bring my morning paper in here, Miss Fane?" He waited for no permission, however, nor did he, on entering, do more than thrust the paper into his sack pocket, while he stood near the young girl, surveying her work.

"This is delightful!" he said finally, throwing back his head and drawing a long breath. "It makes one shrink from going back to mere lodgings, however. How much," he added, looking at the invitingly laid table again, "these—well, decorative—touches in life mean after all! I wonder what you would say to my rooms."

Alison smiled. "Tell me," she said gayly. Janet was approaching with her tray, the odors of fragrant coffee reached them, and Alison moved forward to hold open the door, but still kept her eyes upon Broderick.

"Janet," exclaimed her "favorite in the clan," "I've just been telling Miss Fane that the sight of such a table makes me dread going back to my dingy quarters."

"Eh, then, stay a bit!" said Janet sagely, while Alison moved about, assisting to set forth the daintily served dishes.

"If I could!"

Janet looked at him anxiously, and with a pucker between her brows which Alison already understood.

"You'll be back again, my lad, very soon, I'm telling you! Very soon," she said solemnly.

"Does she really think Mrs. Broderick's failing?"

Hugh asked Alison directly they were alone, and she had poured his coffee, and was preparing her own.

Alison nodded her head slowly.

"Yes—and I almost think so myself!"

"And then"—he paused, his brow contracted. "Alison," he said suddenly, "excuse me, I don't think I am usually so forgetful of good manners. Listen to me! I cannot but feel your position among them all likely to be a very trying one, more so than you can suspect. Will you promise me to think of me as one who can, at least, advise you in time of perplexity, or it may even be trouble. If so, I will leave here with a freer conscience."

They had risen. Alison had a curious feeling that it was a moment in which "good-by" was being said to something, what she could not have told, which she would fain have kept, at least a little longer, until familiarity had made it more completely part of her life, as it might be of her thoughts. Utterly free from any mere sentiment in this sudden friendship, she was governed entirely by what she recognized as Broderick's strength, honesty of will, and character; and the desolation of her own lot, especially should what he and Janet seemed to think imminent, her grandmother's sudden death, come to pass, rushed across her with a new sense of its cruelty, its forlornness.

"Yes," she said hurriedly, wondering if the pair of grave, dark eyes, fastened upon her face, were not reading her inmost thoughts; "yes, Mr. Broderick, I promise you, freely—gratefully."

She raised her eyes with their unmistakable purity and candor to his face, as she held out her hand, and Hugh in spite of a sudden, most unlooked for impulse, did not permit himself more than the pressure of farewell of

kindly feeling, which was all that Alison read in his words, look, touch, or seeming; but when, in answer to a summons from Mrs. Broderick, he had hurried away, the girl stood still, her hands clasped tightly together, the color slowly coming into her face, reaching to the waves of soft brown hair, as she smiled, vexed, ashamed, baffled by her own lack of dignity.

"But if only," thought Alison, "he will not, in that busy life of his, forget our bond! No, he will not forget! Come what may, until he himself bids me not do it, I will trust him!"

And the look, proud, sweet, happy, which this reflection lent her face, was still there when Hugh came downstairs for the actual good-by.

It was brief and formal, of course, yet once again their eyes met, remembrance of what had been a sincere pledge of friendship in the swift look exchanged, and then he was gone, the heavy hall-door had closed upon her glimpse of a bright experience, and Alison turned to remember that now, above all other times, when depressed no doubt, by her favorite's departure, Mrs. Broderick would need her.

She was none too soon. The old lady's ordinarily watchful look had grown to something near its too frequent petulance, and, as Alison appeared, she said, with a nervous gesture:

"Come in, come in! I was just going to send for you. Well, Hugh has come and gone! but there's a great deal, I assure you, left to do!"

CHAPTER XV.

DR. EGERTON'S house in Lower Exeford was best described, I have always maintained, by the guest of a night, who declared it was "overflowing," for so it was, with hospitality, good humor, kindness, everything which can combine to make a home what it should be, and although more than once care and grief had knocked at the doctor's ever open door, and chilled his fireside, yet there was that inner core of trust, faith, confidence, in the guiding Hand, the ruling Spirit, which softened the blow, lit anew the fires, and kept those who were left bound by a closer chain, a gentler, surer bondage of affection and mutual care of each other's well being and deepest needs.

It was a large old-fashioned house, on the widest part of Park Street, not far from the river; and if the sound of the busy Exeford mills reached it hourly, yet it had to float over the brick wall of such a "town garden" as was not to be found in all the county; where the gayest, as well as the daintiest, and shyest of blossoms were cared for, and throve like the doctor's family itself. Mrs. Egerton was a famous gardener, and, consequently gave a peculiarly magic touch to the flowers she loved and tended with such skill, and so the garden, restrained by no merely conventional rules, was an enchanting place to lounge about in, provided with the most attractive of wicker seats, with plenty of shade, a square of velvety lawn, and two walks so daintily protected from the hottest sun's rays as to have earned the right to be called a

Pleasaunce by the tall, gray-eyed, trim-built young lady who on a certain summer morning was walking up and down therein, her companion, a very pretty, wholly uninteresting looking girl, about the same age, of eighteen perhaps, who sauntered at her side, listening to what Kate Egerton was saying, with a very forlorn expression in her big brown eyes.

"No good will ever come of it, Maggie, I assure you," Kate was remarking as she looked compassionately upon her companion. "Can't you girls contrive to have your fun some other way? For my part," and here Miss Kate's nose was decidedly in the air, "I'd scorn the whole proceeding!"

"And well you might, Kitty Egerton!" exclaimed her companion, in a tone at once high pitched and doleful. "For, as we all know, you have everything you want at home; but with me, what, now I ask you, what is there?"

The girls were standing still for a moment, and Kate put one of her slim brown hands on the daintily frilled sleeve of her companion's gown.

"Why, Maggie," she said quietly, "there's just yourself."

"Myself!" declared Maggie; then she laughed scornfully. "Well, I guess you're right; there's just that and nothing else."

"It's everything," declared the doctor's daughter eagerly. "Now, then, just listen: here's your grievance as I understand it. You want to join the Exeford sociables, and your mother prefers you shouldn't. Now let me suggest what I think some of her reasons may be. These sociables are started by a set of people with nothing on earth to do and a great deal too much money and foolishness to do it with. The object first, last, and foremost is

fun—no matter how obtained, at what cost, by what experiments; show, excitement, a wild rush and tear; and what, when it's all said and done, is offered in exchange for your peace of mind, which, believe me, is—must be—wholly sacrificed!”

While Kate was speaking, the expression upon Maggie Payne's silly little face varied, until a look half ashamed, half defiant settled upon it.

“Oh, you're, no—I was going to say such a prude, but of course, Kitty,” said the girl: “no one could call you that! but you don't know what a dull life I have of it! Why, only this morning I was telling Jack Leigh just how poky things were, and he said he'd see I got over to Exe-town for the last Fair day, anyhow.”

“Oh, indeed!” Kate's pretty upper lip was curled, and her brows considerably elevated for an instant. “Very kind of Jack, I'm sure. By the way,” she added suddenly, “has Hugh Broderick come back, I wonder?”

Maggie shook her head. “I think not, but, oh, yes, I believe he is expected to-night. He went down on business for Gorman's, didn't he?”

“Yes.” Kate was silent for an instant, then she said very quietly, “I'd like to know what he would say, Maggie, to the sociables!”

“He! oh, well!” exclaimed the girl, with a light toss of her head, “I don't suppose he could dance if he was to die for it! Of course, I know he's awfully good looking and, well, taking looking, whatever you choose to call it, with those dark eyes of his and that superb mouth and chin; but after all—why, do you know, Kate, Linda Gorman said the other day she didn't think people ought to treat him quite as they do; it would give him, well, ideas out of his rank, I suppose.”

For answer the doctor's daughter at first stood still, regarding her friend with eyes that danced merrily as sunbeams, then she gave away to an irresistible peal of laughter.

"Oh, dear; oh, dear; oh, dear!" she exclaimed, "and that is Linda's latest, is it? Oh, I'm so glad I have her opinion on that important subject! Poor Mr. Broderick! I hope he'll never hear of it."

Maggie looked seriously uneasy now.

"Oh, I hope not!" she said meaningly.

"I ache to tell him," declared Kate, with another tinkling laugh. "I can just see how his eyes would twinkle, and his mouth twitch under his mustache. Oh, don't look frightened, my dear! I can't do it, you see, as it would be so downright ill-bred—but, oh, I wish I could!"

"Well," said Maggie, relieved on this score, "that's just what Linda said; that's all I know. But, Kate, surely mother won't refuse the Leighs' invitation?"

Kate's bonny young face was grave enough, now.

"No, dear," she said slowly; "I suppose not." She hesitated an instant, then added in a lower tone, "Well, as father always says, Jack Leigh is a gentleman any way in one sense of the term, and Agnes——"

"Agnes is a perfect darling!" cried Maggie Payne, with a pinker color than ever in her cheeks. "And I can tell you one thing, Kate Egerton, I know for a fact: if Jack Leigh doesn't appreciate her, someone else does!"

The gayety in Kate's expression had died away completely, now. The doctor's daughter had a look which her mother would have been proud of, on her usually *riante*, happy young face.

"So, that is the kind of thing you listen to, is it,

Maggie?" she said slowly. "Poor Agnes! I wonder if she knows how her guests dispose of her feelings."

Maggie was silent, but more because Kate's manner baffled her than from appreciation of what the doctor's daughter really meant her words to imply. She was decidedly uncomfortable, however, and relieved herself by a little air of bravado and would-be unconcern.

"Oh, of course I understand what you mean, Kitty," she said, very loftily. "But you must remember Agnes doesn't try in the least to conceal her feelings, and Jack is so—so—blind, and Gray Gorman——"

Kate put out her hand.

"Don't please," she exclaimed. "I declare it's enough to sicken one! Here are a whole set of people rushing over to Exetown on any sort of excuse to accept the Leigh's hospitality, everything, and one and all ready to concoct a hateful scandal the next minute! Can't we keep out of it?"

"O Kate," protested Maggie, "how seriously you do take things!"

"Yes," exclaimed Kate, so promptly that Maggie was startled. "Yes, thank Heaven, so I do! some things very seriously! Come on now, Maggie," she added suddenly, and with a softer look and tone. "There is father in the study window, beckoning to us. It looks as if he had a letter in his hand. Perhaps it's from Guy for me."

And with a light wave of her hand, and a "Yes, father, —coming!" Kate urged her companion on, pausing at the low open window of the doctor's study adjoining his office, where he stood with a large square envelope in his hand.

"Broderick is in the office," he exclaimed, as the girls stood still. "He brought this in with him, and, Kate—

girls—what do you suppose? He's been sent for to New York again; his old relative there it seems is very ill, perhaps this time dying. But he has a message for you, Miss Maggie."

The girls were making their way around to the other door, when by a look Dr. Egerton detained Kate for an instant.

"I'm afraid I don't know quite what to think will happen," he said gravely—he and his eldest daughter were, as her mother often proudly declared, veritable cronies, on most matters of interest, whether at home or abroad—"if that old lady down there is really dying and that ruck of relatives come in for Gorman's. It will turn the mills, or rather the poor hands simply into machines to fill their pockets, and the tighter Gorman puts on the screws, the more they will make out of it! And I had hoped Broderick would be master there, before now!"

"But, father," asked Kate, "is it not true that Mr. Broderick has a wonderful invention on hand, which even Gorman couldn't compete with?"

The doctor smiled. "Ah, my dear! I've been born and bred, as you know, among factories and factory people, and for one 'great'—that's what they all are in the inventor's brain—invention that makes a man's fortune there are a hundred that ruin him, not in fortune only, but in hope, purpose in life, ambition, everything! No, no! I'm no croaker, my girl, as you know, but I'd rather see Broderick a 'hand' at Gorman's all his life than face the disappointment I fear is in store for him."

"Poor Hugh!" murmured Kitty, looking down.

"Go out there and see him for a moment," said the doctor cheerily. "Ask him if he found anything in New York better than old Exetown." And as his favorite

daughter disappeared in the direction of the office the doctor looked after her slim, proudly carried young figure and sighed.

"God forbid any sorrow should come to my brave girl of this!" he reflected. "Most people would call me, I suppose, an old simpleton, for encouraging it! But whether he is all his life only one of Gorman's hands or a master of the mills himself, Hugh Broderick will never be more nor less than what he is this moment—as honest a gentleman as God ever fashioned!"

And meanwhile, in the big, half shabby, wholly comfortable outer office, Hugh Broderick was explaining to Kate Egerton, first that her friend Maggie was out at the gate talking to young Mrs. Jack Leigh, then that he was returning post haste to New York.

"And shall I say it's too bad?" enquired Kate, with her saucy dimple coming in view, while she looked up with a provoking air into Broderick's face. "I mean, too bad that old lady is so very ill? I admit I've been longing for a change of some sort at Gorman's."

Broderick smiled down upon the lovely arch face of the girl before him. Already a half formed plan, which had been working in his mind, gathered new shape. No girl in Exeford he felt sure could be a truer friend to Alison Fane than this one before him, yet, perhaps he had better wait a little longer. After this second visit he would see. "Change!" he echoed. "Well, Miss Kate, if old Mrs. Broderick dies, there will be more changes, I don't doubt, than you and I can think of at this moment! Who knows what they imply? New hands, new masters, new everything, and your humble servant will 'fold his tent like the Arab.' "

Kate's smile was faint, but she shook her head gayly.

"Oh, no, Mr. Broderick! you'd *never* silently steal away; it isn't your fashion of doing anything."

"Perhaps not." He spoke absently, then rousing himself held out his hand. "I suppose," he added, with a smile, "to do my duty I ought to ask you if I could perform any commission for you in New York, but I'm afraid I'd bungle it fearfully. However——" He was about to add that a young friend would help him when Kate, with a quick flush, exclaimed, "Oh, will you do something for me! Oh, yes; you won't bungle!" and before Broderick could answer she had flown from the room and to the foot of the wide, shallow-stepped old staircase where she paused, her finger on her lip, as she reflected what reasonable errand she could give him? Merely for the sake, she well knew it to be, of having his service; having something he had bought and chosen for her to store away among her special treasures.

"You're only to go to this address," Miss Egerton said, returning presently with a printed card in her hand, "and please pick me out a small silver horseshoe, I want it for a particular purpose, and a yard of white ribbon." The color sped wildly into her face at the last words, wondering if the absurdity of sending by him to New York for a yard of white ribbon occurred to Broderick, but at all events he appeared, as he was, perfectly unconcerned, said only "Very well," slipped the card into his pocket, and the rare *tête-à-tête* was over.

"I may have a very especial favor to ask of you, Miss Kitty," he said, holding his hand out for good-by; "that is, when I come back. I'm not sure, but I think, I hope so."

The girl's sweet face was uplifted bravely, she nodded her head as he spoke.

"Ask away!" declared Kitty, not aware of the very confident pressure her little fingers were trying to give Broderick's strong hand. "There's a lot of superfluous ability in certain directions going to waste in me! I declare, as I often tell father, he ought to advertise me as an example of his skill as a physician!"

Broderick returned the clasp of her honest little hand warmly enough. Was there ever a brighter, honester, sweeter young creature! And what a "good comrade" she could be!

"I'll not forget, Miss Kitty," he said, smiling. "Take care, don't be rash! I may make very wide demands upon that heart of yours, in a good cause."

Her color came and went again, but she still smiled gayly.

"I'll give you my banking hours," she declared.

"Agreed! well now, it must be good-by, until the next time."

Another quick pressure of his big hand on her slim one, a look, a nod, a smile, and the doctor's daughter was alone. She did not move to watch his departure; only, as she heard the side gate, by which he had gone out, give its little click in answer to his swift pull of it, a queer strained look came into the girl's eyes and lips, into her whole face, but she raised her head a bit higher.

"And this is the first time," thought the girl, "in all my life anything of the kind ever happened to me! and if he doesn't care! Good Heavens, Katherine, my dear, what will become of you?"

And then, with what she felt a needed "pulling of herself together," Kate went out to the shady, sleepy old street, where a pretty basket phaeton was drawn up, the girl within it evidently waiting and watching for some-

one, even while she listened to Maggie Payne's artless chatter, absently answering now and then.

She was perhaps as fair a type of what was called the fashionable world of Exeford and its adjoining Exetown as could be desired: tall and prettily formed, with a delicate face, the softest of brown eyes well shaded by long dark lashes, which, when lifted, gave a wonderful effect to the sweet gravity of her young face, as well as setting off its creamy fairness, a well-formed nose, a mouth of childlike color and sweetness, and a chin lovely as Hebe's. To deny that Mrs. Jack Leigh was a beautiful woman would have been impossible; yet what was it the exquisite flower-like face needed to complete its charm—nay, to enforce it? Beside Kate Egerton's bright irregular face, with its witchery of color and expression, Mrs. Leigh's perfection even faded into insignificance. Only such rather stupid prettiness as that belonging to little Maggie Payne could serve as its foil; for of stupidity, of any kind, no one could accuse the one considered far away the beauty of all Exe county!

"O Kitty!" Mrs. Leigh exclaimed, in her sweet, winning voice as the doctor's daughter appeared, "I wanted so much to see you! What are you going to do about the last Fair day? I count on you; remember, Kitty!"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" was Kitty's prompt answer; the gatherings at Braune House, the old, if somewhat fanciful name of the Leigh mansion, were famous in Exeford, and indeed throughout the county. "Well you may, Agnes! I wouldn't miss it for anything; but isn't your husband going to New York?"

Agnes Leigh's pretty brows were elevated, her face flushed, as she laughed and shook her head. "Not yet a while. Hugh Broderick is going down again, and do let

us hope this very disagreeable old lady will make up her mind to something. By the way Hugh seems to have taken quite a fancy to that plebeian little niece, or granddaughter, of our revered relative!"

Kitty nodded. "Yes," she assented, and bearing the close scrutiny of her friend's glance admirably, "and therefore one can be sure she must be very nice."

"Oh, of course!" said Agnes, with the nearest approach to a sneer her really sweet nature would allow. "Mr. Broderick's standards are perfection."

Kitty was silent, and with another long-drawn sigh, expressive of the vague discontent—no other word could be used—of her feeling, Mrs. Leigh gathered up the reins and prepared to drive away.

And then, suddenly, Kate Egerton did something which sent the blood flying up to her pretty hair again. Just turning the corner was a tall figure, that of a debonair handsome young fellow, dressed in the perfection of summer morning costume, and whose glance, as it fell upon the basket phaeton and its pretty occupant, was marked by a decidedly insolent, too open admiration.

"O Agnes," cried Kitty rapidly, "do you mind driving me down to Bend Lane! I must go there, and it won't take you very much out of your way!"

And as Mr. Gray Gorman approached, lifting his straw hat and smiling lazily upon Mrs. Leigh and her companion, Kate darted away, irritated more than she would have owned by being, as she put it to herself, "an officious gooseberry"; and yet there was the satisfaction of outwitting Gray Gorman in one of his shallow, frivolous, altogether unmanly schemes.

CHAPTER XVI.

IF Alison found her occupations, during the days immediately following Hugh Broderick's departure, anxious in the care they entailed for her poor grandmother, she was thankful in any case to have every moment filled; so that the restless, vaguely discontented feelings, which somehow clung to her after what she called her holiday, could be better kept at bay. She was rarely away from her grandmother's bedside; her moments of liberty, when she was not actually at her meals, were given to snatching some fresh air and exercise, and Hilda Benton was not forgotten. Alison had cheered her most effectually by reporting what she hoped from Hugh Broderick's visit; meanwhile she had seen to it that the young woman did not actually want; while the physician, who had called in response, it appeared, to a remark of the druggist Alison had patronized, was caring for her physical needs in a very kindly and generous fashion.

Alison, on one of her flying visits to Charlier Street, had met him—an energetic, plain-looking, evidently hard-working young man—and had been much relieved to find how well he understood the case, and also that he was strongly in favor of Hilda's trying to find work somewhere out of town; the Exeford idea commended itself as admirable to him.

Dr. Holton had walked nearly as far as Mordick Street one afternoon with Alison on returning from a hurried call upon her new friend, while he discussed this question with

her, and in bidding her good-by, gave her his card, remarking it might some time be of service; if she needed him at any time, especially in regard to Miss Benton, he hoped she would not hesitate to call upon him.

"No, indeed, and thank you very much, doctor," said Alison, in her sweet, earnest way. "I'm sure, but for you I don't know what might have happened! Who knows," she laughed brightly, "I may sometime bring you some important, wonderful case, and be a better patron to you!"

He smiled brightly. "Very well, Miss Fane! Don't forget it!" he rejoined, and lifting his head, and nodding once more, the young doctor made his way homeward, curiously impressed by something about Alison herself which made him say in his own mind that stranger things had happened! and who could tell! Not for a great deal would the struggling young physician, whose home comforts were too few to enumerate, have foregone the pleasure which had crept in all unawares upon his life since that first chance visit to Charlier Street; and this brave-looking young creature, he reflected, with her ready sympathy of look and voice, was evidently cut out, and fashioned by nature, to help other lives.

Alison meanwhile had found ample occupation for mind and body on returning home. Mrs. Broderick was decidedly worse, her physician had been summoned, and the moment Alison entered the sick woman's chamber she realized that an important, awful change had come. Not that the danger seemed close at hand. No, Mrs. Broderick's faculties, her look, voice, gesture, all forbade that idea; but something which had been in the keen, hard, handsome old face, had drifted away, something else was slowly creeping over it.

Alison awed, but not dismayed, stooped to kiss her

grandmother's withered cheek as she stood beside her, and composed her voice while she enquired at once if there was anything she could do.

"Yes," Mrs. Broderick murmured; "write for Hugh, I want to see him. No—*telegraph*! Tell him not to delay."

And this accomplished, Alison, after a brief conference with Janet, prepared herself to take up her post in the sick room, determined to do and be all that was possible while the evidently flickering spark of life lingered.

The physician came and went. It was too evident that he himself considered his visit only one of ceremony, and Alison followed him into the hall, mentioning she had summoned her grandmother's nephew, and "business man at Exeford."

"Very right," said Dr. Morris gravely. He had been introduced to Alison, and concluded she was only another of his eccentric patient's many relatives. But he liked her better than any of those he had chanced to see in Mordick Street. She was very young for any care in the impending emergency, but she looked, he fancied—what, with the exception of old Janet, the others did not—very true.

"I am sure, my dear young lady," the great functionary said, in leaving, "you are sensible enough to understand the—well—end is near, and I have persuaded your—grandmother, is it not? to let me send an efficient nurse in for the night. I will call in the evening, early."

And with every appearance of solemnity, such as the occasion required, Dr. Morris bowed himself away, and Alison returned to her station in the sick room, too anxious, too thoroughly roused to a sense of the real danger her grandmother was in, to think in any way of herself.

Again the same earnest look from Mrs. Broderick's dark eyes greeted her, and the waxen hand on the coverlet motioned her to draw near.

"We are alone?" she murmured, and as the young girl bowed her head in assent and seated herself at the sick woman's side, Mrs. Broderick's eyes searched, scrutinized, read her face with mournful anxiety.

"After all," she said slowly, "it is but right and just; a terrible trust, however, Alison! I wonder if I can give it to you!"

As Alison remained silent her grandmother continued:

"You are right, my child, not to answer hastily! Listen: I want to extract a promise. Remember I am dying, let the doctor say what he may. I want you to go to Exeford, to work there as you, as Hugh Broderick desires, and to follow out such directions as I will leave. Do not imagine anything wonderful or mysterious in all this; I am not one to do anything of the kind." A smile flickered across her face, and Alison, answering it, shook her head.

"Hand me my dressing-case," the old lady continued, "and I will give you a paper, a memorandum you are to read when I am gone. I had meant at first to tell you of it; but now, something, Hugh—well, it is best that you should receive it from my own hands."

Alison silently obeyed; gave the cumbersome old-fashioned dressing-case to her grandmother; watched her fit the key slowly into the lock, and from an inside case take out a document which was in a long law envelope, and which, screening it from Alison, she read carefully, slowly, to herself and then replaced it, sealing the envelope, with a dreary smile.

"Alison," she said slowly, "this seal of course means

nothing, but your word is *everything*. Keep this paper. When I am gone, read it, consult with John Robbins about it. Then do as you will find I have asked that you should! If you think I have been hard on you——” She paused, stretched out a withered hand, and Alison clasped it at once in both of hers. The warm young touch sent new life into the dying woman’s veins, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes almost brightened.

“A solemn trust, Alison, my child! See that it is kept,” she murmured. “God grant I am not too late!”

Her eyes closed wearily for an instant. She opened them to say, “You are sure, my child, you understand just what I mean?” and on Alison’s quick pressure of her hand, her softly uttered assent, the sick woman said quietly:

“Read now a little while, my dear, some—something—not of to-day.”

It was a scantily accorded permission, but Alison gladly took advantage of it to read from her own Testament, and then from a volume dear to her in many ways, a little book which had been her mother’s, and which, in words so simple that their power was felt as beyond all language, told the story of Redemption, the hope for every day and hour—every instant, if it were only, as the title implied, done, felt, suffered, hoped, “All for Jesus.”

And the woman of the world, lying there, listened in a silence that enclosed a lifetime’s thought and feeling—a lifetime’s struggle, effort, success, and almost failure. What she had striven for so hard had passed away, what she had missed had come to her, only as life was closing; and now, physical powers failing, sight and sense, touch and hearing fast giving away, the living stream of human life flowing out, narrowing as it reached the great ocean

of God's forever, Rachel Broderick strove with powerless hands to stay the course of time but a day, an hour longer, that her "house" might be "set in order," the watchfires of her soul lighted for the Master's return—so long absent, so long shut out by her own hands from the door-way of her heart and soul—what wonder that as Alison's gentle supplications went up beside her, it seemed almost too wonderful to the dying woman that He should come at last, speak to her fading senses, her well-nigh deaf ears,—to move her lips so long, so coldly, dumb; but Alison, as she moved away, making room for Janet and the young doctor she had contrived to send for,—the physician from Charlier Street,—knew that in full possession of her mind, at least, her grandmother realized what was taking place; knew clearly that the final summons had come at last, the hand no power could stay touched hers, bidding her "rise up, and follow."

Well done or ill, wasted or garnered, a faithful or a truant tenant of the Lord, the hour of reckoning had come!

"I sent for you, as being near," Alison whispered to Dr. Holton, who had been prompt in trying various restoratives. "Dr. Morris will be here to-night."

The young man shook his head. He and Alison and Janet were at the bedside, about to lift the dying woman into an easy posture, when with a smile—for Alison, the girl was sure—a look full of tenderest and sweetest meaning, the eyelids quivered and drooped, one long-drawn sigh, and the lonely, eager, restless life was ended! Strange that what she had never felt with Mrs. Gildersleeve, her companion of years, rushed over Alison now—a wave of actual grief, sorrow, deepest compassion, merged into a moment all anguish; and the girl, realizing what had

happened, flung herself on her knees at the bedside, bursting into an agony of tears. How utterly friendless, utterly alone, once more, poor Alison felt, who could guess? But it was no time to give way to personal regrets. As Janet led her from the room, whispering a word or two of consolation, poor Alison remembered this; remembered that life had begun a new chapter, no doubt a new struggle for her, and every force of mind and soul would be needed to face this uncertain, lonely future.

CHAPTER XVII.

"ANY possible service I can render you, Miss Fane, I will be only too happy to perform." Young Dr. Holton was the speaker as he and Alison stood together in the dining-room of the quiet house, the morning after Mrs. Broderick's death. The great doctor had been and gone; the nurse he had engaged was induced to remain for a few hours, and every moment the family was expected. Meanwhile, poor Alison had been gathering her forces, rousing herself to face this new emergency, only too well aware that, with the arrival of her unknown connections, action would be imperative. And any moment now might bring those nearest at hand. How anxiously she watched, indeed actually listened for Hugh Broderick's coming, she dared not admit, even to herself!

"Thank you, Dr. Holton," she said, with a grave smile, "you are very kind. Yes, you can be of service at once. I wish very much to see a gentleman on business as soon as possible. Can you send him to me? and will you call yourself, to-morrow? One word more. My friend, your patient, Miss Benton; will you let her know what has happened? Assure her it will only serve to hasten my plans for her. Tell her to keep up good courage until she hears from me!"

The young doctor's face brightened as she spoke; more than ever was he impressed by Alison's good sense in entrusting him with this commission; and he readily promised to do her bidding, suggesting a telegram as the

best means of reaching the address on the card she handed him: "John Robbins, 14 Birch Street, Brooklyn."

"The quickest way, that is all," said Alison, as she gave him her hand in parting, "and thank you so much. I will not soon forget your kindness."

Alone in the quiet house, Alison and Janet held a long, half tearful, but wholly sympathetic conference. Our heroine did not hesitate to tell the older woman at once of her plan for work in Exeford, her grandmother's distinct wish that it should be so, and before they had dismissed the subject Janet's mind was made up on one point. Not if she could help it, would her "young lady's bairn," start out alone! If she was bent on this factory work, then she would, at least for a time, go with her, until she heard from her own kith and kin, now in California. It seemed to put the seal of certainty, as of protection, on Alison's enterprise, and her thanks were all old Janet needed to dispel her last doubt on the subject.

"Eh, but she's a brave bit of a lassie!" thought the old woman fondly. "If she'd but been a boy, now! Even Master Hugh himself couldn't have beaten her, I'll be bound!"

The quiet, mournful day had nearly closed—its dreariness only marked by the telegrams received from Exeford and Exetown heralding family arrivals as well as messages from the relatives nearer home—when Alison was summoned by Janet to the dining-room, where Mr. Robbins, looking very pale, but important, was awaiting her.

Alison had roused herself for all the possible difficulties in this meeting, but the really clever, shrewd, and kind-hearted little man relieved her mind at once from its chief source of anxiety, that it would be hard to make him accept her ideas and assist her to act upon a fixed plan.

He was evidently only anxious to meet her more than half way; proud of her confidence, of her needing his legal advice, which he gave clearly after the first habitual "office" formula, and advised her to deposit the money which he held in trust for her—the seven hundred and fifty dollars—in some secure bank at first.

"I am not at all sure, though," said Alison, "but that I will need it all, or the most of it, at once. You had her confidence so thoroughly, Mr. Robbins, that you know she has left me a fixed mission to perform; and, like almost everything else in this world, it will need money."

"Very true, Miss," the little man admitted. "Then, in what form shall I hand it over to you?"

"The way it will be easiest for me to cash, without attracting too much attention. Could you get me part of it at once?"

"Why, of course, all of it, Miss Fane! I'll see to that at once. The will, as I understand it, is not to take effect for six months."

"Yes, but I believe it is to be read, made known, when the family meet."

Mr. Robbins moved about uneasily.

"Queer! queer!" he observed, addressing first the ceiling, then the inside of his derby hat.

"And meanwhile, Mr. Robbins," Alison went on, something in her quiet voice, her pale but resolute young face, impressing her visitor as singularly self-contained for one so young and gentle in every way, "I have a paper I wish you to keep for me. You will find it sealed securely. Keep it in the safest place, until I ask it from you. Where will that be?"

"Why—a—the Trust Company vaults, Miss," declared Robbins, feeling that eccentric as the late Mrs. Broderick.

had been in life, it might be her death involved complications more unusual than he had suspected.

"So that any moment I can get at it, but meanwhile feel sure it is all safe?" said Alison.

"Certainly, certainly, of course! I can put it away for you, give you the receipt, etc. etc."

Alison listened, understood, and fully agreed with him, while Mr. Robbins' own sense of importance grew. His chivalry was roused as well; there was something at once appealing and fascinating in the position of this young girl, and Robbins inwardly decided if he were the arbiter of fate her lot should be very different from what it appeared to be at present. But then—well, he had enough experience of life and law as well to know how seldom the victory is to the brave, the race to the strong.

"They'll all be on you soon, Miss Fane," he observed presently. "The family, I mean. Mr. Wilks, I believe, is the legal gentleman in charge, but"—he looked at her earnestly—"may I offer you one piece of advice, coming from one who knew your—ahem, knew something of your grandmother's wishes. Keep up! Don't let any of them down you! Down them first!"

His look was so supremely amusing that Alison was forced to smile, but she made haste to assure him he need have no fear for her strength of mind in this regard, and again thanking him, asked how soon she could expect the money, and would he also take a message for her to Mrs. Norton.

She would hear from him early the next day, he promised, and with pleasure agreed to take any message, while Alison as delicately as possible made it clear that, much as she valued his friendliness, in all this she understood it was also a business matter, and at last accom-

plished her purpose not only of paying for his advice and service, but arranging that, on this basis, she should always feel at liberty to call upon him.

"A perfect lady!" was the little man's reflection as, their conference ended, he prepared to depart; and Alison, left alone, sat down for a few moments in the darkened room to think on what had passed, and what was to come, to rejoice in having, as she fully believed, two staunch friends at least, among all connected with her grandmother's home, in Janet Holdsworthy and this kindly little man; while further away, yet, somehow, how curiously near she could not but feel, there was Broderick himself! oh, the comfort, the repose of seeing, talking to, consulting with him again!

And at this moment a timid ring at the door-bell aroused her. She heard Janet's step along the hall, the door opened, and a subdued but evidently eager talk go on among two or three people.

"It has begun," thought Alison, standing up. "Now, very soon, I will know, by sight and sound any way, some of the people Hugh Broderick told me about. How long ago that day seems!"

Some steps drifted away up the staircase. Then down the hall came one the girl was sure she knew! Alison started to her feet, ashamed of her own swift, tremulous pleasure, as the door opened on Broderick himself; and as he took the hand she held out eagerly, clasping it in an expressive silence, she said, with tears dangerously near her eyes, which were fastened on his face:

"I am so glad! so thankful you have come!"

Broderick's clasp did not loosen, and as Alison's head drooped he said very gently:

"I came directly I got the message! And, my child,

listen to me! Now that I am here, remember I am wholly at your service. Will you think of me as though I were your brother, to do for you in every way what you want or need, and to take any care I can off your mind? Remember, I think"—he smiled as she lifted her eyes to his face—"we made a very genuine compact of some kind, did we not?"

"Oh, you have come, anyway," said Alison, with a sigh; "and I don't feel, even now, as utterly stranded and helpless as I did. See!" she added, moving away to resume her seat and look up at him. "I am going to ask favors at once!"

"Go on!" He looked down gravely at the tired young face with its feverishly lighted eyes and warm flushed cheeks, all betokening, as he well knew, an overstrained condition of the nerves. "But I shall have my say, I think, first. If I am here as your elder brother, your friend in any way, you must do certain things I bid you. There must be rest, sleep, nourishment. We don't want to have the doctor called in."

"I will try and obey," she assented, but there was decided nervousness in voice and manner. "But, you see, there is so much to be done."

"Nonsense! Weak, over-tired people always talk like that! No; unless you agree to a certain extent to be guided by me, I will let it all alone."

"What am I to do then?" she asked at once, resting her head on her hand and looking up at him with a weary smile.

"Put whatever is troubling you into my hands," he said decidedly. "The nearest things first, the matters just at hand. What, for instance, was especially worrying you as I came in?"

Alison smiled. "The people who I suppose are here now," she admitted frankly.

"Ha! I thought so! Well, that is easily settled. They are not so very formidable, but I advise you to be on your dignity, to say as little as you can to them; and remember, while I am here I will in a quiet way stand between you and them."

She raised her head quickly with the little gesture Broderick remembered he had been amused and pleased by before.

"Thank you. They are upstairs now, are they not? Who is here?"

"A Mrs. Parkinson—I leave you to judge of her for yourself—Mr. Wilks, I believe, you have met or know of; Jack Leigh, well, in some ways the best of them all, I think, and yet—never mind, you will see them."

Alison hesitated again before saying: "And they will know at once I am going to Exeford, I suppose?"

"Yes; and best of all, you will find a stanch friend waiting for you! If not actually one of the 'clan,' she comes so near it that she is the most intimate friend of the best among them, and what a friend she can be you will speedily find out for yourself."

"Is she a relation?"

"Oh, no!" He laughed shortly. "Poor child! What your ideas of family are, you show in your very way of saying that word! She is the daughter of the leading physician in the place, Dr. Egerton. If you can make friends in that house you need not fear the rest very much. Kate, the girl of whom I speak, is a royal creature."

"Ah!" exclaimed Alison. "It sounds encouraging; but then *I* go, remember, as one of the working classes."

He smiled again. "There it is! Exeford will surprise

you in certain ways. Glove-making has so long been, so to speak, its backbone, that to work or have worked at it in some fashion is in or of the history of every family. It is only certain of the associations, and the drudgery, the commonplace kind of toil I dislike for you."

"Never mind," said Alison lightly. "Oh, I must not detain you! They will be sure to need you upstairs."

She held her hand out; Broderick smiled, looked at her with quiet kindliness, and went away, while Alison's final reflection, if strengthened by their talk, yet had for its basis the same unaccountable dread of this first meeting with the people among whom her lot for some time to come, whether for good or for ill, was unquestionably cast!

But at least she had a background of safety in Broderick's undemonstrative, but shrewd, alert kindness. How it would be when the workaday world brought them together it was hard to predict; but of one thing the girl was sure: however the exterior might seem chilled, she believed his friendship would never falter, unless act of hers repelled, deceived, or disappointed it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE dreary-looking parlor seemed almost animated when Alison followed Broderick into it by the little party gathered there, and who were conversing in those brisk whispers far more annoying and certainly quite as demonstrative as the ordinary tones of conversation or discussion, but every one turned now to look at the young girl so nearly related to Mrs. Broderick, yet whose position was such an anomalous one.

Mrs. Parkinson, an affable-looking large lady with a great deal of manner, which in some way seemed part of her crisp, rustling silks, her large, plumed bonnet and eye-glasses, moved forward at once, sweeping Alison with her glance while Broderick said gravely:

"May I introduce Miss Fane, Mrs. Broderick's granddaughter, Mrs Parkinson; and," glancing at the others, who were all equally observant, "Mr. Wilks you know, I believe, and Mr. Leigh, I hope you and Miss Fane will make friends very quickly," a suggestion which roused the third member of the party, a very handsome, but evidently much bored young man of about eight-and-twenty, to come forward and say pleasantly:

"Very glad to meet you, Miss Fane, and give you a message from my wife."

Alison returned his honest, friendly glance with a swift look of pleasure which made her face charming, and as she took his hand said something in a low, gentle tone which Mrs. Parkinson, failing to hear, that lady put up her glass again, saying: "What's that? Beg pardon, my dear?"

And Alison could not quite subdue her amusement as she answered that it was scarcely worth repeating.

"Though I'm sure well worth hearing!" said Jack Leigh cordially. "Miss Fane was saying that she hoped to find a friend in my wife, which she certainly will."

"Oh, yes, yes, of course," said Mrs. Parkinson, in a somewhat altered tone, and as Alison drew nearer, and Broderick and Leigh began a low-toned conversation with Mr. Wilks, she said in an impressive voice: "Very hard on you, my dear, I am sure! But there! death has to come! It's well that you are young, and you look healthy. I suppose——"

Alison, well understanding what it implied, filled in the pause.

"I am glad I am both young and healthy," she answered with a faint smile, but looking with perfect composure on her interlocutor. "They are requisites in what I have to undertake, now that I am doubly alone in the world."

"Oh, yes, just so," assented Mrs. Parkinson. "Well, my dear, now—an advertisement, they say, is the best."

Alison smiled again, but this time with more genuine amusement.

"Oh, I have fortunately secured employment," she said gravely. "I have a friend with whom I am going to Exeford, and she understands the work and will help me when Mr. Broderick takes me into the mills."

"Well, upon my word!" Mrs. Parkinson was really surprised; too much so not to wish to hear more. "You are actually going to work there as a paid hand?"

"Well, I hope I'll earn my wages," smiled Alison, thoroughly enjoying the situation now. "I can but try, and it seems to me better than some other employments."

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt," assented Mrs. Parkinson,

feeling decidedly grateful that Exeford was separated by nearly a day's journey from New York. "Well, my dear, I hope you'll succeed; but it's too bad. Your grandmother might, I think——"

"My grandmother did the best in every way for me," said Alison quickly. "She knew and approved of my plans."

"A very headstrong sort of young person, I can see," Mrs. Parkinson was saying a few moments later to Jack Leigh, while Broderick claimed Alison's attention at the lower end of the room, where he seemed to be talking eagerly and earnestly to her, and her face raised to his expressed considerable anxiety. "Not at all the sort of girl one would expect! I'm glad I didn't bring my Rachel up with me! Just as well not to begin any acquaintance. What 'll you do about it? Up there, right almost in your own town, Jack?"

"About what?" said Mr. Leigh coolly. "Oh, Miss Fane? Why, I expect before a month is out she and Aggie 'll be as chummy as if they'd known each other for years and years!"

After which Mrs. Parkinson, finding nothing to say, contented herself by drifting about the room from one point to another, examining the heavy old-fashioned articles it contained, much as she would have done had it been one of the many auction sales she had a mania for attending, while young Leigh attached himself to Alison, talking eagerly, cordially, best of all with honest heartiness in everything he said.

"If your mind is really made up, Miss Fane," he observed, "why, let me tell you, there are worse places than Exeford for work! And your being Mrs. Broderick's granddaughter——"

Alison smiled. "That won't help me, I'm afraid, Mr.

Leigh," she said quickly. "I rather agree with Mr. Broderick in feeling it will go against me. My seeking work of itself will prove myself cut off; don't you see what I mean?"

"Ye-es, yes, I suppose so." He spoke absently, slowly, but looking with grave earnestness at the young figure, the soft, girlish face before him. "But it may turn out better than you think; and Broderick tells me you are not starting out alone."

"No, oh, no! To begin with, you know I own some real estate in your town! Didn't you know it? A small cottage for which I've had twenty dollars so far—half a year's rent—then a friend here, quite a competent glove-maker, is, I hope, going with me."

"Upon my word! So you'll set up housekeeping?"

"I hope so; and perhaps, until we are safely launched, our old friend here, Mrs. Holdsworthy, will stay by me. She is waiting for some letters before going out West."

"Upon my word," declared Leigh heartily, "things might look worse by a great deal! Well, all I can say is, you'll find a friend in my wife and one in me, come what will."

"You are more than kind! I never shall forget it!" exclaimed Alison in a low voice, really deeply, profoundly moved by the young man's thoroughly disinterested kindness. If all went well, how she trusted in the future to repay it! and who could tell? Did not the peculiar, unexpected, perplexing circumstances of the past few months justify our heroine in thinking the future might include events in which their positions could almost be reversed? In any case accepting the offer of his good will and friendliness, Alison registered a silent vow never to be unworthy of it; to repay it in goodly coin of that honest realm which has sincerity and truth for its defence, fidelity for its "sign and seal."

CHAPTER XIX.

It was an easy matter, Alison found, to slip into a position of almost obscurity among all the newcomers, friends (?), relations, etc., who were in possession, since it was evident she counted as of no importance to any of those who remained all of that dreary day. Broderick had gone on business to New Jersey; young Leigh had "escaped," as he called it, to some more cheerful *rendezvous*, and Alison, anxious to hear from Hilda Benton, too unnerved even for a talk with Janet, busied herself in her own room with preparations for a suitable, quiet mourning garb, her heart and brain alike occupied, while over and through all was that strange feeling of awe and wonderment, which the presence of God's messenger in any dwelling must bring, and alone, unobserved, she took her own last farewell of her relative, her friend, as she now thanked God she could count the one upon whose lifeless form she gazed tearfully, affectionately, gratefully, and the "I will be true; with God's help I will do your bidding, grandmother, I promise you," came audibly from her lips as she bade the last real farewell. What came later would be merely the outward token that all was over.

And with keenest anxiety she looked for Mr. Robbins' coming, for news from Hilda Benton and the Nortons; around these humble friends the wheels of her own life seemed now to revolve, and it was characteristic of her nature that those who were or might be in any way in need

of her seemed at this crisis really to possess the claims of a natural tie, while such actual kinship as bound her to any of the others affected her not at all.

Janet, tearless, but with a worn look on her old face infinitely touching to Alison, came to summon her downstairs about four o'clock. The faithful Robbins was in the dining-room; his face and manner composed to what the occasion required; yet Alison could not help observing that in his really conventional decorum was not a touch of hypocrisy; it was impossible that he should really feel afflicted, but his look, tone, manner, were all what was due the actual state of the household, and Alison contrasted it with the solemnity of those eager for the very last to be over, and appreciated it accordingly.

"I got back a trifle sooner than I expected," he said as Alison, after greeting him, sat down evidently anxious for his news. "Your friend, the lady in Benton Place, was very sorry—ahem—about any trouble and desired me to say she and they all hoped you'd count on them at once for anything; and she said particularly, if you felt like it, couldn't you run up there for a night or two after the—all is over?"

Alison caught at the suggestion. "Yes, yes, indeed; they are very good. I believe it would be best."

"Very nice people, I declare. I saw the young lady of the house, I presume?" And he described Molly in glowing terms. "I shall certainly avail myself of their friendly invitation, and bring my wife and son to call there."

Alison bowed in acquiescence. She was thinking anxiously just what to do next, and Mr. Robbins continued:

"And here is the money, Miss Fane. May I suggest a safe place of keeping?" He counted the bills carefully, once, twice—produced a receipt which Alison signed, and

watched her with anxiety place the amount of her "fortune," as she called it, in a little leather case she carried in a bag on her belt.

"It means too much to me to be careless with it," she said gently. "And it has to last a long time, you know."

"To be sure; and now then I might mention that Dr. Holton is upstairs; he asked me to say he had a message from a friend of yours and his."

"Oh, will you not bring him down here, Mr. Robbins?" asked Alison. "And stay yourself. There is nothing you cannot hear in what I have to talk over with him."

And five moments later the young doctor had been summoned, and Alison, explaining just what Mr. Robbins had accomplished for her, listened eagerly for news of her new friend, his patient in Charlier Street.

"You can easily imagine she is both grateful and pleased," the young doctor made haste to say, "and desired me to tell you so, Miss Fane, and also that her time was yours; whenever you were ready she would be, and from our little talk I'm inclined to think that the glove-making idea is not so bad a one after all. If I can make time to run up and call upon you," he added, with rather a conscious smile, "may I be sure of a welcome?"

"You may indeed," returned Alison warmly. "I can't tell you how much more cheerful the future seems with this work, and companionship, and housekeeping in prospect. Yes, indeed, Dr. Holton, you may count upon the warmest possible welcome, however humble the place we have to receive you in."

It was precisely as she said; once more alone, after bidding the doctor ask Hilda to make ready at once, Alison found new vigor and spirit in the thought of her venture, and it was pleasant also to think of a quiet day or

two with her friends uptown. It was easy to imagine in advance the tenor of what they would say and think, conjure up of possibilities, romantic, prosaic, and otherwise in her present condition, and again Alison remembered the acts of genuine kindness and courtesy shown her in that busy, good-humored, but really hard-working household. After all she had almost too much to be grateful for, and if the tiny speck on her horizon—what it was, or might be, Alison would not allow herself to think even—obtruded itself too often near the faint silver lining of her cloud, the girl had a means of banishing it from view each time by the thought of the work which she had actually undertaken.

“Better realize my danger,” she reflected, as a queer contraction of the heart annoyed her on only hearing Broderick’s name mentioned by old Janet, “than let it warp me in judgment or action; and, after all, let me see what the new life brings before I make fast any bondage of the old one I am leaving.”

And Alison, who had been standing rather dejectedly in the dining-room window, turned sharply and went away up to her own room, where all but the very last preparations for her own flitting had been made.

CHAPTER XX.

"WELL, I'm sure!" exclaimed Mrs. Norton, coming into her, as usual, well-occupied dining-room one afternoon a day or two later. "You girls don't need any of those trashy novel papers and books you're always after, when stories in real life are going on every day! Why, I'm sure Miss Fane's history is a first-class tied up and labelled romance if there ever was one! And coming right back to us, too! Well, she knows a good friend when she sees one."

"I always said there was the real stuff there," observed Connor, looking up from the first edition of his evening paper with a most judicial manner; he had an unusually "early" day from his employment. "But what beats me is how she didn't make more out of the old lady!"

"That's nothing! She's a girl bound to win," said Molly eagerly. "Will she be here soon, did you say, mother?"

Mrs. Norton, who had already given her eldest daughter the news Mr. Robbins had imparted, proceeded now to exhaust it for the benefit of the rest of the family. Mrs. Broderick's funeral had taken place, and Alison, who it seems was going to Exeford shortly, proposed spending a day or two with her former friends first. Mrs. Broderick's will, it appeared, had not given universal satisfaction, although everyone concerned admitted it might have been worse; the old lady being quite capable of founding a Hospital for Idiots with the fortune they each and all con-

sidered theirs by right. Affairs were to go on as before for six months, subject to Mr. Wilks', the lawyer's, occasional supervision, at the end of which time he could make known a codicil in his possession. Just what had prompted Mrs. Broderick to so unusual an action was not apparent, although, as Connor remarked, it was clear that Alison Fane was "settled"; she was the only direct beneficiary, the old lady's jewels and the sum of \$750 having been formally left her in care of Mr. John Robbins. This, it was easily seen, precluded all idea that there was anything more in store for her, and Molly might as well stop her romancing.

"Money or no money, she's a daisy, though!" observed Connor as he strolled out of the room, and his mother, watching him, half whispered to her nearest daughter it would be the making of him "if he'd only take a fancy" to their late lodger; and added a regret that, owing to Alison's mourning, she supposed nothing in the way of a "treat" could be thought of.

Meanwhile Alison was already on her way to Benton Place; the anxieties, excitement, and even bustle of the past few days inclining her more than ever to scenes entirely remote from those she was quitting, while she had parted from old Janet only on the distinct understanding that she would see her in the morning.

Mr. Wilks had taken everything in charge in the old house; a caretaker had been found in a worthy elderly couple; and the place was to be virtually closed, and as may readily be imagined, the "clan," as poor Mrs. Broderick called them, had very quickly dispersed on learning what they were, or rather were not, to expect.

Jack Leigh openly lamented the state of affairs, especially leaving "old Gorman" where he was, but it was

“clover” to him, so he declared, to carry back news of Alison’s determination, and he was sure of Kitty Egerton, Broderick, and his own wife as stanch allies of the new “hand,” who certainly looked under her soft exterior to have all the pluck and vim needed for any enterprise; and he could fancy just how calmly but successfully she would frustrate any attempt at either being put down or patronized. And, unless he was more mistaken than usual, there was no lack of fire, passion—all that, combined with true womanliness, makes up a temperament at once fascinating and powerful—in that slender girl with the changeful hazel eyes and lovely childish mouth, who carried herself like a princess and had the innocence of a Madonna in every word and look. “I wouldn’t want to forfeit her good will or encounter her displeasure, though!” thought Jack, summing up his impressions in the words “Trump, I’ll engage she’d be. Looks as if she could strike fire enough, if need be! Well, Exeford will seem a queer box for her, I expect, after her mode of life in Europe and even here!”

And after the fashion of the world he began wondering just what influences had been at work in Alison’s life to leave her still “unbespoken!” For that marriage was the end and aim of every woman’s existence he, like most of his sex, believed a fact not worth disputing! Anything else as a career was, of course, as he thought, only for the so-called strong-minded sisterhood. And it was evident she was heart-whole and unengaged, or the fellow would certainly have “shown up” at such a crisis.

Broderick’s departure was hastened by an imperative business demand of Gorman’s, but Alison found he had thought in various ways of her even in his haste, and

she had kept in a very carefully hidden place his brief parting note:

"I will send word to you directly I return about the cottage, work, etc. Meanwhile at any moment call upon me, and anyway do let me know you are well, not breaking down, even in your decision."

"Well, well, my dear!" from Mrs. Norton, "*How* do you do!" and "I declare! well, it seems natural to see you!" etc., etc., from the girls, greeted Alison in cheery accents as she found herself once more among her former friends; tea or supper was already *en évidence*, the usual prompt additions made to the customary meal, Connor in his freshest linen and newest blazer put forward, and Alison, with more of a home feeling than she had thought possible to have anywhere, found herself escorted up to her old room, where Molly lingered after the others departed, with her own especial budget of news; poor Molly had reached the age when she had "attention" by prescriptive right, but alas, she had allowed her young affections to respond to those of an estimable but not particularly brilliant or "forward" young man. "Though I'm sure," declared Molly, as sitting upon Alison's trunk she recounted her most recent disappointment in "Billy's" not getting the situation he had been promised, "if goodness and worth were anything nowadays, Miss Fane, Billy ought to be a millionaire! If he was like some of those dudes I'd say serve him right, and give him the go by to-morrow; but, no, sir, Billy's *too* good, that's the trouble."

"Then just be patient and thankful," declared Alison. "O Molly, my dear! even lately I've seen enough of the mean side of life to think moral worth all that counts!" and as best she could, and with consoling success, Alison

cheered the girl up, going into a sufficient narration of her own affairs to turn Molly's mind from her perplexities and interest her in the new chapter of her present life.

And so, once more, Alison found herself seated among her first friends in the great city, listening as before to their small plans and projects, their aims and desires, with a queer sense that practical, even prosaic, as the outward details of her own affairs might seem, nevertheless there was, there would be, a vast amount of machinery within to be understood, taken apart, put together, kept in working order, before what had become a fixed purpose with her now could be accomplished.

And so the era of what had been in her thoughts a new life, begun so short a time before, rounded its first period; and Alison, composing herself to sleep in the little room she had so lately occupied, could not but feel more and more convinced that the guiding hand throughout had been Divine, and with that truest of humility, doubt of herself in any new turn of the wheel, prayed that the same light would shine ahead for her, and all dear to her, in places where she feared, nay, knew her steps might weaken or falter.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE 4:30 express from New York to Exeford was ten minutes overdue on a certain afternoon early in September, and Hugh Broderick, walking up and down the platform of the railway station, had consulted his watch half a dozen times with visible impatience before the shrill scream of the whistle smote the air; a general rush toward the doors and outer platform, and the bustling about of porters and trainmen announced that the event of Exeford's day was at hand.

Broderick was quick to see a familiar face in the car window, to spring on board, as Alison and her companions, Hilda Benton and old Janet, came toward the door. In the first glance, while he held her hand, Broderick saw that much of the tired look had gone from the girl's face; she seemed brighter, bonnier, he told himself; her winsome sort of look had returned, and that she understood the query in his glance it was clear, from the way eyes and lips smiled together.

"Now, then," said Broderick quickly, "I suppose you ladies all want to go, as soon as possible, to your home, Miss Fane. I have the key; it's only a step away, and the woman who is in charge has it, as she says, 'tidied' up. Give me your checks, Miss Fane," and as Alison did so, Broderick walked away and the trio had time to glance about this, to Alison at least, wonderful undiscovered country.

The town, as they saw it, lay irregular and yet closely

built, with the towers and smoke of innumerable factories, encompassed by as fair a country as autumn sun and sky ever lighted: rich woodlands belted hills that already showed the gorgeous hues of autumn, where the land lay level, stretching to an horizon blue as a summer sea, the variations of winding roads, hedges deeply green, fields ripe and waving in abundance, orchards proudly laden, and over all brooded the soft stillness of the autumn day,—the peace of a fruitful, beneficent nature, bountiful in what she spread before the eye, gave to the senses, the heart, and soul, in this country, which not so long ago a tired wanderer from other lands and seas, described as “truly a resting place, though belonging to the Red Men chiefly,” and a “haven of delight after many perils.”

The hum and throb of the great mills seemed distant sounds, but in some way Alison thrilled in response to what their tuneless music sang, and she began to understand a little better what Broderick had meant by their “sense of power,” their being to him as “arteries of life.” But no doubt practical experience would reduce much of all this for her to a very commonplace, possibly sordid level.

“Now, then,” said Broderick, coming back; “it is a short walk from the station.”

He led the way, walking with Hilda while Alison and Janet followed, along a plank road, and out into a narrow street, evidently belonging to the older part of the town. Shops and houses were mingled—in many of these the trade of the place seemed to be carried on; some dwellings bearing signs over their doorways which indicated that glove-making or leather preparing, in some fashion, was carried on within; yardways showed the product of the town in various stages of dyeing, tanning, etc., but at short intervals were fine dwellings, some really beauti-

ful gardens, and every dooryard even seemed to boast its owner's love of flowers.

Bend Lane was a turning from a busy street; its cottages were few in number, neat and with trim gardens, and our heroine's "landed estate," as she had laughingly called it, was on the corner of the Lane, quite detached from its neighbors—a small two-storied frame building, once painted brown, whose back windows and bit of garden overlooked a narrow, but quite turbulent bend of the river Exe, and beyond it was the rich valley land our forefathers had enriched and prospered, the hills rising in the far distance, blue and golden in the evening light.

"Now, then, Miss Fane," said Broderick, fitting the key in the door; "you should enter first and bid us welcome!"

Long afterward Alison was, in very different scenes, to recall that moment! She could see again the open door held back by Broderick; the interior of a simple old-fashioned living room, with deep window seats, high wainscot, and tall, black-painted mantel; the staircase walled in, but leading upstairs at the back directly from this room; the kitchen in a sort of L, to the right, the windows at the back of which enclosed a picture worthy a wider frame, a richer setting, the glimpse of old garden beyond; the strange, pervading odor, as of long dried rose-leaves—some forgotten perfume of a vanished day—all combined in the impression of her new home; all were part of what came to be a sweet, if sad remembrance to two at least of the little party; and as Alison, humoring Broderick's fancy, smiled, bowed, and said gayly "Welcome! *all* of you!" her eyes challenged his to read the future for her, but he only answered by motioning them to enter, and saying in a more serious tone:

“The woman who has been in charge here lives close by; she will attend to anything for you. I will send her and perhaps look in later to see how things are going on, and prepare you somewhat for to-morrow.”

He was gone a moment later and Alison, with the delight of a child, turned to Janet and Hilda Burton, laughing gayly.

“Oh, isn’t it delightful!” she exclaimed. “Janet! Janet! you must teach us every kind of housekeeping, do you hear? I declare, I don’t think a princess in a palace ever felt prouder of her home than I do this minute of my own little bit of a cottage!”

CHAPTER XXII.

THE great bell at Gorman's had sounded the noon hour of temporary dismissal, and the last reverberation had not died away before the brick-flagged and walled yards were the scene of hurry and bustle; men, women, growing boys and girls hastening out to take advantage of the time for a run home, a bit of "fooling" about, or perhaps to transact some necessary business in the town itself. A comparatively small number lingered to eat their noonday meal in the now quiet workrooms, and perhaps to add to their earnings by a little overtime work, and among this number, one day three weeks after their arrival in Exeford, were Alison and her companion Hilda Benton, the latter, whose employment was in a grade much higher than our heroine's, having hastened down at the first stroke of the bell to find her friend.

Alison was standing in one of the windows of a long, narrow room, gazing absently upon the courtyard below, a pile of cut gloves before her scarcely indicating that she had been very industrious during the morning, but as Hilda drew near, she smiled like a rebellious child; and spreading out her hands, tried to cover up the unfinished work.

Hilda laughed. "I'm afraid Mr. Gray Gorman will be even more severe than usual, Alison!" said Hilda, shaking her head. "And he is by no means in a very good humor any way to-day. He tossed aside a great deal of my work as very poor."

"Did he?" said Alison lightly, but there was something quick in her tone and eyes. "Well, I don't know what he will say to mine."

The girls were silent for an instant. Alison had opened her dainty little luncheon basket and proceeded to share its contents with Hilda, while the latter continued in rather a constrained tone:

"Did he say anything to you about the fair at Exetown?"

Alison nodded. "A little; he asked if I—we were going."

"So he did me," returned Hilda; "and I answered that I only wished we could, and it just now seemed to depend upon Janet. However, he told me he thought there was an invitation in the air for us."

"More of his nonsense!" declared Alison. But she added presently: "He may mean that Mrs. Jack Leigh intends to invite us. Miss Egerton spoke of that when I met her this morning."

"They say she gives very fine parties on this occasion."

"Yes," said Alison; "and I should like to go over there, I confess, and see the old house, especially the music room, if it could come about without Mr. Gray Gorman!"

"*If!* Ah! what a world of ifs!" Hilda gazed down dejectedly.

"Nonsense!" laughed Alison. "A world of *ifs* is a world of possibilities! Come, Hilda! We must have something to show for our hour. When Mr. Gorman came over this morning he remarked that evidently I wasn't anxious about Saturday night!"

She took up one of the gloves as she spoke, snipping at some loose threads.

"I wonder whose hand this is destined for?" she said,

without lifting her eyes. "Last night I amused myself by a long romance of a glove, from the first bit of leather down to the time a fair lady drew it over her hand—her fingers!"

"You'd make poetry out of anything!" sighed Hilda. "Tell Mr. Broderick that the next time."

Alison laughed. "No; our talks have become purely scientific. In time he really thinks I may develop some——"

Alison's voice died away. She looked down resolutely, and Hilda, raising her eyes, observed the cause. The very well-dressed, indifferent-looking, handsome young "man of the mill" as some called him, Mr. Gray Gorman, was approaching; his manner its usual mingling of careless ease, condescension, and superiority.

Alison's glance was uplifted, now coldly fixed upon the young man who, just touching but not removing his straw hat, said pleasantly:

"Mrs. Leigh is downstairs, Miss Fane, and would like, if you are not too busy, to speak to you."

"I am not busy," said Alison quickly, and sweeping her work to one side, "and will be very glad to see her."

She paused half a moment to smooth back one or two rebellious locks of hair at the mirror tacked against a jutting beam in the wall, then ran lightly down the two narrow flights of stairs, to the room where her hat hung, thence out to the roadway at whose curb Mrs. Jack Leigh's pretty phaeton was drawn up.

Her fair, lovely face with its delicacy of contour and rich bloom was in repose, pathetic in its sadness. Whatever hint Alison had of the cause, she had made no sign on the few occasions of their meeting, although nothing in the lives of those she cared for around her was ignored.

Something about young Mrs. Leigh had attracted her from the first; appealed to her as though *she* were the older, the stronger of the two, and Jack's wife no doubt was aware of it, clung to it, grasping at it as a moral, almost physical force.

"Well, Miss Fane," she said at once. "Did I disturb your labors? Gray—Mr. Gorman—said you were free just now."

Alison smiled. "I was struggling to make up for lost time," she answered lightly. "But more than pleased of this excuse to run away."

"I want a favor," said Agnes, after a barely perceptible pause, and, with one little gloved hand resting on the side of the phaeton, she leaned forward and spoke more earnestly. "I want to capture you for two or three days! Think of that! Except for the last—the last Fair day I will be all alone; then a great party are coming. I told Jack I would not leave until I had your promise."

Alison's first feeling was one of unmixed pleasure and decided acquiescence, but the next moment showed her the difficulties in the way.

"You are more than good!" she exclaimed, her eyes lighting as she spoke. "But really, how can I contrive it? Do you quite forget my position?"

Mrs. Jack Leigh's pretty delicate brows drew together petulantly.

"How often do you require to be told that is not of the slightest consequence!" said Mrs. Leigh, with the little upward toss of her head characteristic of and rather becoming her piquant flower-like style. "To begin with, we are all hopeless levellers here, as Jack—or was it Hugh Broderick—remarked, and besides you being——"

"Mrs. Broderick's granddaughter? Oh," said Alison

lightly, "that, you know, was long ago disposed of, when it was discovered that my relationship wasn't worth a hundred a year. To be acknowledged as her granddaughter and heiress—I admit that would have set me afloat on the best wave of society."

"Exetown is not Exeford," observed Agnes, still somewhat vexed. "We are at liberty to do as we like by right of really having family traditions."

"Even to the extent of inviting a 'hand'?" said Alison mischievously. "But there! Am I not stupid and—*bête* is a better word—to stand arguing your delicate courtesy away! There, now! A few days alone with you is enchanting! Am I to yield?"

"Of course! And I have something really worth offering you."

"What better do I want than your family party?"

"Ah! I am to have the first of the great concert discussions at Braune House! Think of that! Mr. Ogden-thorpe will be there, and Herr Meyersen! There! I thought I had a reserve bait in store, young woman, in case you proved refractory! So come prepared, as the professor says, for Music—music—and *encore* music."

"Bewitching! glorious!" declared Alison. "Good-by then to gloves and the music of the mills for a time! What a queer people you are up here! Business and culture walk hand in hand at every corner!"

Agnes regarded her friend with a quiet smile for an instant in silence.

"Alison Fane," she said calmly, not looking at her, but slowly flecking the off pony's ear with her light whip, "I never know what to say or think about you! It is all a puzzle! Well, never mind; so long as your very self-willed little ladyship has agreed to honor me, I won't

quarrel with you lest you change your mind, as you are quite capable of doing."

"No," said Alison quickly, the soft, serious look on her face proving her words. "Such glimpses of Eden come too seldom in my way! Ah, no, Mrs. Leigh, you don't know how grateful I am! You are kinder than you know!"

"I'd like to be," said Jack Leigh's wife eagerly. "Oh, my dear! Well, some day perhaps we'll know each other better, and the kindness, as you call it, will be on your side."

"If it ever is!" exclaimed Alison, curiously impressed by the other's words and look. "Then remember, I shall have a debt to pay you and your husband I can never forget! I am serious! I mean it!"

She laid her hand on the daintily gloved one of her friend, and Agnes nodded her head, but did not, could not speak.

"Very well," she said at last. "Heigh ho! I fancy, my dear, I could be a genuine beggar for kindness such as yours if I needed it! Well, there goes that horrid bell! Remember me to your friend, Miss Benton; can we not have her over on the Fair day? I want you all to myself beforehand."

"I don't doubt she would like to come," said Alison. "May I tell her you asked it?"

"Yes, do; put it as prettily as you like—or shall I write a note? Yes, I'll do that! Now, Alison,—some way I forget half the time to say Miss Fane,—remember! I'll meet you at the depot at one o'clock on Wednesday. Don't dare to fail me!"

And with a pretty little nod and a snap of her whip Mrs. Jack Leigh drove away, leaving Alison to retrace her

steps slowly, pleased beyond measure with the prospect of a visit to Exetown, Braune House, as the Leighs' place was called, and the charm of such music as she knew could be counted on; the interest in that art being highly cultivated and encouraged in both towns; talent developing in a way which was a perennial source of surprise to the visitors who flocked to the older town twice a year when its now famous musical meetings took place. And the Leighs' house was a distinct centre. The Martinvilles had been musical for generations; rumor had it that Agnes' grandmother was a famous public singer in her day and that she herself had received tempting offers; but be that truth or report only, the fire of the art burned strongly in Agnes' veins, and, although an indifferent performer on any instrument, she had a voice of singular sweetness, highly cultured, and counted upon always at these annual concerts, to which all the county, as a matter of pride as well as culture and enjoyment, flocked; no doings in the outer world affecting them as of half the importance belonging to their own special festivals.

Alison retraced her steps, thoroughly pleased by what was in store for her; yet not liking to leave Hilda alone, especially as her friend was inclined to take the saddest view of all outer circumstances; a trait Alison was perpetually making war upon, and almost wishing some great crisis would occur in Hilda's life which, rousing her out of her dreamy, half moody fits of abstraction, might bring to the surface the real grit, endurance, and fine spirit she felt sure the girl possessed.

"Never mind; Janet will look after her, and I will devote myself to amusing her when she comes over," thought Alison, as she turned to run up the narrow stair-

case, unconsciously humming an air half under her breath until a polite, "I beg your pardon, Miss Fane," made her look up suddenly to see Mr. Gray Gorman moving, rather crowding himself back, to make way for her. But Alison, with the little inward shiver she was apt to feel in his presence, only said coldly: "These stairs are absurdly narrow, Mr. Gorman," and went on her way, quite unconscious that the "young man of the mill" went on his way, vexed, disconcerted, with renewed determination to "bring her down. And yet," he was forced to admit to himself, "there's something—I don't know what to call it—exasperating, or fascinating, is it, about the very way that girl snubs one! I wonder what she'd be like if she was—well, liked a fellow?"

"Hilda," Alison exclaimed directly she had rejoined her companion, "here's a treat in store! Fancy going over to Braune House for a Fair day!"

And as Hilda listened, brightened, really seemed quite excited over the prospect, Alison felt more than ever grateful to Jack's sweet young wife, who meanwhile was driving her ponies up the main street, observed, commented on by many, for the Leigh "turnouts" were always studied and admired when they appeared in Exetown's sister village, as some of the older people still called the busy factory town.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"AREN'T you early, Agnes? The train isn't due until one o'clock, you know."

Young Leigh put down his morning paper, standing up with his unfailing, if rather cold courtesy, to hold the door open for his wife.

It was the morning of Alison's intended visit, and at breakfast Mrs. Leigh had announced her intention of meeting their guest at the station herself, after which she could attend to some household matters in the town. But, as the distance from Braune House to the station was less than a mile, twelve o'clock was decidedly early to start.

"Never mind," Agnes answered carelessly; "I have some business in town to attend to."

"Suit yourself," said Jack, in his good-humored way. He assisted her into the dainty little carriage, saw to it that the duster protected her pretty mull draperies and pale blue ribbons, and—for a moment Agnes almost fancied he meant to kiss her good-by!

But it was evident such "silliness" was no part whatever of Mr. Leigh's programme. Nor, indeed, fair as his young wife looked sitting there with all the glory of the summer morning falling about her graceful figure and delicate, lovely face, did such an idea occur to him. Agnes' good looks, her exquisite taste in dress, her refinement, above all, that touch of *hauteur* which she could show even to him, all pleased, satisfied him as did the fine, well-chosen, perfectly *comme-il-faut* style of his house,

his pictures and statuary. Bad taste was inexcusable to Jack Leigh. That in any way Agnes was incapable of it made her valuable to him; was any deeper feeling worth bothering, striving for? "Good form" was Agnes' hall mark in everything, a fact doubly to be rejoiced over, since there was so strong a current of Bohemianism in her veins from the "singing" people, as their old housekeeper called her grandparents.

It was early for the train, but Agnes had been quite correct in saying she had business to attend to, and her first direction was to an old street in the town, where at a small music store she alighted, and going in inquired if "Celia" was at home.

The youth in attendance, after an instant's admiring inspection of the tall, exquisitely dressed lady, nodded his head, and going to a side door, bawled:

"Cele! I say, *Cele!* Come down, can't yer?"

And on Agnes saying quickly if Celia was upstairs she would go up herself, he held open the door and watched his visitor run up the steep flight of steps, and knock at the door upon which they ended abruptly.

It was speedily opened. A girl of twenty-five or six, tall, largely built, plain-looking save for a pair of wonderful, luminous dark eyes, appeared, her face glowing with pleasure, but:

"Oh, Mrs. Leigh!" was her only comment as she led the way into a large sitting-room, the principal furniture of which consisted of two pianos, a small reed organ, and a bookcase laden with music.

"Celia," said her visitor at once, declining the chair offered, "I want your assistance in two or three days. Are you going to be very busy the Fair days?"

"Well, not so very," said the dark-eyed, admiring Celia.

"I want somebody for accompaniments during to-morrow; well, from to-night on for a few days at Braune House. Can't you undertake it? You must come early, and be ready to practise between times if you're needed. Do, now, Celia! I shan't believe you care really to make and save any money for the future if you won't."

"Oh, I'll go gladly enough if Berthold will spare me," said the girl. "I'd like it, Mrs. Leigh, money or not."

"He must spare you!" said the young mistress of Braune House decidedly. "If that is all; and, Celia,"—she lowered her voice,—*"I want you to do something else. I want you to make good friends with a new friend of mine. You'll meet her when you come. Now, Celia, is it a bargain?"*

It was, but as Mrs. Leigh, well pleased, was about to leave, Celia said suddenly:

"Oh, I quite forgot! Here is a letter which came to my care for you."

And, with apparently not the slightest curiosity or surprise, the young girl handed her friend an envelope addressed in plain, bold characters.

A deep flush overspread Agnes' face as she took, opened, and hurriedly glanced at the letter. She tried to feel deeply annoyed. She was vexed, yet there was one cause for satisfaction to her in the letter. It gave a weapon into her hands which she might, nay, doubtless *would*, need in the very foolish, ill-advised action she was planning, and once in the phaeton again she drew the letter out of her pocket and re-read it.

It was only a few lines, but a dozen pages could have said no more.

"I can't *possibly* get over to Exetown this morning," wrote Gray Gorman in his bold, easy hand. "You know I would if I could, but business, etc., etc. However, I'll see you as soon as possible and discuss a great deal. There is something of importance to yourself in every way which you ought to know. I venture to send this letter to Celia Kane's care, hoping you'll get it promptly. You need not answer. Better run no risk.

"G. G."

For an instant Agnes hesitated. Then tearing the note into minute fragments she flung them to the wind, and sighed deeply, bitterly. A look of infinite weariness came into her face, and oddly enough, in the long-drawn sigh that came from her heart to her lips was the half audible sound of her husband's name! Was it breathed as a talisman against danger, or only the natural impulse of her passionate, loving, unasked for young heart? Whichever it might be the very sound seemed to bring her to a quieter, softer humor. She turned her horses into the roadway near the station and alighted in a frame of mind which she meant to be only bright and cheerfully expectant of her favored guest.

Half a dozen acquaintances were on the platform. Young Mrs. Leigh's arrival was the signal for much discussion of the Fair and the forthcoming festival, and there was the usual display of musical knowledge, brave use of technical terms, etc., which characterizes one type of the amateur who belongs to a "society"; and Agnes listened, answered, approved, or dissented as the case might be, in a perfectly well-bred, kindly fashion, and then, as the train came rushing along, explained she was down to meet a special friend.

"But, oh, Mrs. Leigh, you will be at the rehearsal to-day, of course!" exclaimed the young Exetown doctor's wife imploringly.

"Of course!" said Agnes lightly. "Don't I always do my duty?"

She smiled and moved away, leaving her friends to wonder who the new arrival might be, and as Alison appeared, and a really cordial, almost affectionate greeting ensued, the "wonder grew," while Alison on her part only glanced briefly about her, the delightful sense of having left factory work behind her, of being with a friend, a hostess, in every way so congenial as Agnes was sure to prove, acted like a very tonic upon her, and her answers to all Agnes had to say came from smiling lips, in her brightest, happiest voice.

"Now, then, my dear," said Mrs. Leigh, as they clattered up the hilly street, "I'm going to be good-natured enough to 'put you up,' as the boys say, to a point or two before we are home. You must know that husband of mine has—well, a mania, I call it, for our old home! He's nothing if not historical, genealogical, etc., on the subject! You mustn't let him bore you, only perhaps you can be a little bit interested. It's a long time since he captured a perfectly new listener and sightseer like yourself."

"Thanks for suggesting it," said Alison; "and he'll have his reward in finding someone really and truly interested! Old houses always fascinated me, far more than most of such things, for they speak of lives and times together, don't they?"

"Ye-es," said Agnes indifferently. "Perhaps I care less because—well, other things in everyday life have so long seemed absorbing. And, anyway, I don't think," she

added, with a little quick shrug of the shoulders, "I ever cared much for Braune House."

They had left the hilly street with its mingling of old and new architecture behind them, but at its hint of widening into the real country the gates of Braune House came into view. An avenue of stately poplars curved past a lawn of richest green, a garden of unusual brilliance and variety of color, and led with a fine sweep to the steps of a mansion which Alison could well fancy belonged to an historic past. The entrance was imposing, the massive walls of Dutch brick were pierced by rows of windows, many of which were half veiled in ivy, and the door was no sooner opened than an impression of something like magnificence was given by the first glimpse of the entrance hall.

A floor of rich dark woods, a space fit for a royal dance, gave the sense of width and nobility of proportion so attractive in the entrance way of any house, while the staircase, curving away at the back, led to a gallery which must be traversed to reach the upper rooms; below there were half a dozen doubly panelled doors, and furniture of a heavy, solid, but comfortable style, tables littered with books and papers, etc., all made it look what it was—a sort of household *rendezvous*; while glass doors at the upper end led into very elaborate conservatories, just now devoted to special greeneries and forcing boxes, the spray, delicate, but widely flung, of a fountain adding picturesque, grace, and a delicate music to the charm of what Alison thought as beautiful a picture as eye could desire.

Agnes, accustomed to the rhapsodies of strangers, whether visitors or tourists, was pleased by Alison's speaking silence.

"It is a fine old place," she said lightly, but only answering her guest's expression. "I suppose I'm—well, perhaps, a little tired of it!"

"It is charming," declared Alison, looking about her with increasing pleasure, "and what you have done is all in good taste; the dark red of the drapery, that dull blue, the touches of green damask, such beautiful dark woods! And that conservatory, Mrs. Leigh, looks as though conjured up by magic!"

A curious look flitted across the other's proud, pale face.

"It was!" she said softly. "If only the magician had not stayed his wand! It was—my welcome home," she added, with a smile, "from my husband. Jack had it built because, when I came here on a visit one time, I said the old hall needed it! I for one could never like it without such a background of living green and blossom."

"Delightful!" said Alison. "No wonder Mr. Leigh has poetry in his nature."

"Poetry?" echoed Agnes. "Well, yes; Jack has more of it really than he knows himself!"

She had touched a silver bell on entering, and as she spoke, a tall, sedate-looking middle-aged woman came from the swing-door to the left, and as she looked from her mistress to the new guest, Alison, in one of her swift fancies, decided she disliked or distrusted her. But when Mrs. Leigh said in her careless way: "Mrs. Macneil, this lady, Miss Fane, will have the brown room, you know," and added: "Miss Fane, Mrs. Macneil is my housekeeper," Alison concluded that the reason of her dislike lay in the fact that no doubt Mrs. Macneil was one of that class of servants who consider it necessary to show their authority, their dignity, their position of trust by an imposing and

rather supercilious manner. Agnes, however, went on at once in the same indifferent tone:

"I will take Miss Fane upstairs. I rang to have you attend to her things; and you can have lunch sent in at once. Come now, Miss Fane," she continued, with a brighter look; "however I may abuse it, I really do delight in showing our old house to a person like your very naughty little self!"

An impulsive pressure of her arm, a gay smile and nod of the head accompanied the words, and, leading the way, Agnes went up the beautiful old staircase, her white-clad figure with its delicate laces and blue ribbons, her charming, proudly uplifted head giving just the one touch of animation it needed to make the picture perfect; and Alison, following, wondered again whence the root of what was surely eating into the core of her friend's generous and noble young nature. Some spell was at work, some cloud brooded over what was a nature meant for giving and receiving only warmth and sunshine.

"I wish I knew," thought Alison; "or at least enough to try and help! She is exquisitely lovely and sensitive, I am sure, but there is something all wrong!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE rooms prepared for Alison certainly showed that the young mistress of the house had not only considered her guest's comfort but chosen to give her welcome a peculiar importance; they were at the upper end of the hall, fronting the poplar-lined drive and beautiful old lawn, and contained every comfort and modern convenience with solidity in furniture, dark wainscot, etc., which marked the period of the old house's first decade. The sleeping-room was lighted by three windows, hung in blue chintz and white muslin; the furniture of shining dark mahogany with heavy brass handles and ornaments, the polished floor, richly colored rugs, high mantel and great fireplace all made the room worthy its history, while adjoining was the daintiest of dressing-rooms full of modern touches, from the blue chintz and muslin draperies to the cool matting, china with rosebuds on a pale blue ground, and furniture of lightest bamboo. It was a room to idle in as well as in which to make a very dainty toilet. A tall cheval glass with a white frame reflected the figures of the two young people as they entered, while on the wall above the prettily draped table a triple-sided mirror gave endless suggestions for the *coiffure*. Flowers appeared everywhere generously distributed; a great bowl of blue china on the table held roses of the deepest crimson, and on the low white wood mantel were glasses in which yellow lilies with their deep green leaves gave a

perfect "finish" to the tone of the charming room. Everything bore the touch of a skilled, delicate hand and nature; Alison understood at once whose it was, and her exclamations of delight were approval and admiration for Agnes' exquisite good taste.

She looked—the young mistress of the house—singularly young, delicate, and wonderfully interesting as she stood in the deep embrasure of a window, while Alison with unaffected pleasure looked at, examined, criticised everything.

"See, Miss Fane—well, Alison, then, if you say so," she said at last, and opening a door of the dressing-room half hidden by a bamboo portière; "I am close by you. This is my own favorite little den;" she showed a very pretty, dainty little *boudoir* full of feminine knick-knacks, characteristic trifles, and some really fine works of art. "This is my very particular private room. Is not Jack good to me?" she added, with the same peculiar constraint of manner. "Only last year, while I chanced to be laid up for a fortnight, he had it all done over. It was after our—my trouble," she added in a lower tone, and, as Alison looked a sympathetic inquiry, she continued a trifle hurriedly, "It was after baby died. Poor little Blossom! I had hoped for so much if she had lived."

There was a brief pause, and she went on still in the same half mechanical fashion:

"She was delicate from the moment of her birth, and it was only by our incessant watching that she lived her poor little life of ten months. She was exquisitely, wonderfully beautiful, and that I knew Jack was so proud of! And you can't think how she simply adored him! At first I thought I must have died too! I could not give her up; but do you know I often look back longingly to those

days now! I cannot tell you how tender, how dear he was!"

The girl's sweet eyes were turned upon Alison with tears half dimming them, and Alison understood! All unconsciously drawn to her new friend by some curiously subtle bond, Jack's wife had disclosed her pitiful, yet, oh, how honorable secret! She was in love, really, and alas, it seemed vainly, with her courteous, well-bred, indifferent husband! In the misery of seeing that tiny little life which was so dear to her in her heart sadness, her splendid loneliness, go out, fade from her, she had been comforted, sustained, so that she recalled those days, to use her own words, "longingly," because in them, through that heart-breaking trial, Jack—her husband, the father of her poor little girl—had been "so good to her," at last so "tender," so "dear," in all her grief! Could story of rejected love be sadder! thought Alison; or what were the trials of a girl whose fancy is not returned by the object of her choice compared to the misery of the wife ignored or uncared for by the one whom she has heard vow to cherish and protect her until death did them part!

"And—she was your only child?" said Alison gently.

Agnes bowed her head silently. In a moment, drawing a long sigh, she continued:

"Of course I could not expect Jack to feel it at all as I did, and men, you know, get over such things very soon; and now I don't think he likes me even to speak of it—and of course I never do—but I'll show you her picture and her little things some day. I look at them very often, and I like to think of what she would be having now, my little baby! but perhaps—there," she broke off suddenly and said with a quick change of tone: "Come, come, my dear! Jack will be dreadfully put out with us. Now don't be

long at your looking-glass, for luncheon must be quite ready, and my young man, like all his kind, is desperately cross when he's hungry!"

She left Alison in her own dainty room again, and if, a few moments later, when she tapped on the door for her, the eyes of Jack's young wife showed traces of recent weeping, she was wonderfully bright and cheerful in manner, and as they went downstairs to find Mr. Leigh, just as Agnes had predicted, quite ready to be wrathful if longer delayed, Alison found it impossible to realize that the cool, rather languid, but perfectly self-possessed woman who listened, talked, and laughed, like one with no deeper thought than the amusement or occupation of the moment, was, could be, the same who half an hour before had seemed only the heart-wrung, desolate, bereaved young mother. And Jack, Mr. Leigh, evidently considered his wife very entertaining and good-natured, and entirely forgot to mention that he had a pressing engagement for the afternoon.

It came out when, after luncheon, Agnes mentioned that she thought of taking Alison down to the Hall for the rehearsal and supposed he would be there.

"Well, I'm not sure," said Jack, in evident perplexity. "You see, I half promised Tasia Mordaunt to let her try Red Rover——"

"Oh, of course, then!" Agnes' brows contracted, but she moved away and turned over one or two odd articles on the table, apparently searching for something. "But isn't Mrs. Mordaunt coming to the Hall herself?"

"That's so," declared Leigh cheerfully. "Why, then I'll bring her over there instead! Yes, of course, my dear, I'll meet you and Miss Fane, but I may be a trifle late."

He nodded good-humoredly, and sauntered off in the direction of the library, while just for an instant, like a flash of lightning, gone as it came, Agnes' eyes sought Alison's with a strange, wretched look in them, to which no words were, or needed to be added!

CHAPTER XXV.

"Now then, my dear," said Agnes cheerfully to her guest, "you will see our friends *en masse* and singly, and I want you to admit that we do very well—we sister towns—for of course Exeford and Exetown combine. I never can understand why the musical resources of our own country are not better understood and appreciated."

It was not worth while to drive to the Town Hall where the rehearsal was to take place; the walk was just enough to invigorate the two girls, bringing some color into Agnes' usually pale cheeks and giving a sparkle to her eyes. She chatted so brightly all the time that Alison found it hard to remember the wretchedness she had seen in eyes and lips, heard in the tones of her friend's voice so short a time before, and wondered if so deep a heartache as she had suspected could exist, but perhaps she dreaded silence, which gave time and room for thought, for scrutiny, and the critical opinion of on-lookers.

The Hall was a fine one, devoid of any theatrical advantages, but the stage was large, places for the choruses at each side ample, and the conductor, a very energetic and agreeable-looking man, was already at his desk, talking right and left, now and then bringing his baton down with a rap-rap-rap to emphasize his opinions, while more than one of his chorus apparently sought him to relate some grievance.

"I'd rather dig potatoes than drill amateurs," declared Agnes, as they walked up the aisle. "Poor Mr. Ogden-

thorpe! He ought to know us by this time! It is always the same old argument. Heigh-ho! I think I'll take to the real thing, Alison; the dear, honest, capable, stupid, intelligent, paying public. You must tell me," she added suddenly, with a quick glance in her eyes; "just what you think of my voice. No flattery now, remember!"

"I won't flatter, any way," promised Alison, and at this moment the conductor, recognizing Mrs. Leigh, moved forward, and bent over to offer a friendly hand and to greet her with the sense of relief which the master finds in the arrival of a safe, reliable pupil and ally.

A few moments later and all places were filled. The company was unquestionably a good one; the faces refined and intelligent for the most part, and the pianist having struck a few opening chords the first chorus began.

It was just as this number was nearly finished that a step, a rustle near where she was sitting caused Alison to turn suddenly and find herself face to face with her good-humored host, Jack Leigh, and a tall, queenly-looking, dark-haired woman, whose faultless toilet of black lace was relieved only by the deep red roses in her small, close-fitting little bonnet, and the one natural flower with darkest green leaves at her bosom, which Jack with prompt gallantry had just shown her was in danger of falling and politely assisted her to make secure.

Alison, with a curious, baffled, disheartened feeling, saw, almost without looking, the glance which shot from the woman's soft, beautiful dark eyes, as she half raised their deeply fringed lids while Jack looked at her with a smile and nod as his little act of courtesy was extended. She was like some dangerous siren to Alison's pure, frank young mind; beautiful, no doubt, but utterly devoid of soul! And in the next moment, in a half whisper, the

young master of Braune House was presenting "Mrs. Mordaunt" to his wife's "particular friend, Miss Fane."

Alison bowed, smiled a pretty acknowledgment of the compliment at Jack, and was conscious that the young widow was, to use a vulgar but expressive phrase, thoroughly "taking her in" through those half-veiled, beautiful dark eyes. It lent courage and animation to her feeling and manner, and she made haste to sweep away her book, parasol, etc., and indicate a place for the new-comer at her side.

"You have just arrived, Mr. Leigh tells me," Mrs. Mordaunt said in a cool, self-possessed voice and with a very critical glance at Alison, inclusive, and it was easily felt, unfriendly.

"Yes; that is, this morning. You sing, I believe? Ah!" she added quickly, and leaning forward to smile at Jack; "there is Agnes!"

It was the first important solo; and Agnes sang it with her lovely face uplifted, her star-like eyes fixed on some point beyond that which would have revealed her husband and his companions, but Alison knew she saw them; guessed that her voice, clear as a bird's, soft, sweet as a child's, then full and rich in breadth and compass, took on its note of exquisite, pathetic meaning, because of one face, one presence in her audience.

"Bravo!" half whispered Jack, as, Agnes' solo ended, he turned with an approving nod toward his companions. "How is that, Miss Fane?"

"Beautiful!" half whispered Alison. Mrs. Mordaunt nodded her head and smiled. "Yes, it is good," she admitted; "better than I expected, for I heard Mrs. Leigh was not feeling at all well, and the voice is such a sympathetic friend in our little heartaches!" She finished her

sentence, shaking her head and smiling at Jack. "You must have been trying to be a better boy for a day or two," she murmured with a half laugh. "Your wife looks quite bright again."

"Don't talk nonsense, Tasia!" Jack returned, also in as low a tone as was compatible with good manners. "She is always bright—too bright, I tell her, for she overtaxes her strength;" and with what was evidently a sudden impulse young Leigh rose, excused himself hastily, and to Alison's great satisfaction a moment later was at his wife's side, saying something evidently pleasing to her, since the lovely fair face colored, the eyes brightened, and a dimpling smile was bestowed upon him, Agnes' hand resting half an instant on his arm while she answered. For an instant only; something dispelled the childlike sweetness of Agnes' expression; a little frown, a shrug of her shoulders came instead. She shook her head in answer to some remark of Jack's and moved coldly away, Jack after a moment's hesitation rejoining his companion in a moody sort of silence which Mrs. Mordaunt was determined to dispel, it was clear, since she talked, smiled persistently at his side until at last, as though resigning himself to the "good at hand," he brightened and an animated talk ensued, the last of which, as Mrs. Mordaunt moved away, in response to a call from the conductor, was Jack's saying:

"Five o'clock, then?" and her answer was a quick little nod and "Exactly; I'll not forget," floated back as she moved with a careless, superb sort of grace toward the platform.

"Now, then," said Jack, drawing nearer to Alison, "you will hear the best voice in the whole affair!"

And as the first notes of the solo, the aria of arias from

"Semiramide," floated out Alison confessed herself spell-bound by the witchery of a voice far less sweet and pure than that of Agnes Leigh, by no means so birdlike in its quality, yet possessed of the nameless power which makes some voices, like some people, a power, magnetic, irresistible, wholly independent of one's calm, critical, even scientific judgment; for by no rule could this voice of Tasia Mordaunt be criticised or judged. It was like the spell of an enchantress, and Alison, striving to shake off its power, was really glad when the last notes died away, and the applause of the little audience covered her own rather ungracious silence.

A great deal of desultory practice followed; bits were gone over and over, a buzz of talk was indulged in from time to time, and at last the session was pronounced ended, and in a general, talkative, good-humored confusion everyone prepared to depart.

"You and Miss Fane can get home all right, I suppose, Agnes," said Jack lightly. "I'll be along later."

"Oh, of course!" said Agnes, in a perfectly cold, meaningless way. She stood an instant as though rooted to the spot, then suddenly turning toward her companion said quickly: "Come on, my dear, and you won't mind stopping in at Craige's, the bookseller's, a moment?"

Alison could only follow, though infinitely disturbed by the feverish manner Agnes took no pains to conceal. Her purchase was only a card and an envelope, and detaching the little pencil from other trinkets on her chatelaine she wrote a few lines hurriedly, sealed, addressed the letter, and swept Alison along with her to the next building, in which was the post-office, where a stamp was purchased, and the letter, whatever it might contain, dropped in the town delivery window. It had all occupied barely ten

minutes and Alison as they went out once more upon the street was wondering what sudden impulse her friend had acted upon, when Agnes, looking up at the fair, cloud-flecked sky and drawing a quick breath, said, in a strange, troubled voice:

"It is all a game of cross-purposes, this life of ours! Heavens, Alison! what I would give for a week, a day even, out of one bit of the past!"

"Why not lay siege to storm the present!" exclaimed Alison. "Come, Agnes! What are you trying to do? Cheat yourself? or play a blind-fold game with to-day and to-morrow, as Hugh Broderick says."

"Broderick!" echoed Agnes quickly. "He need not dispense maxims so easily! He doesn't live on theory, I assure you."

"No," said Alison calmly. "I should not think he did! He is the last one I fancy to do so."

"And yet," said Agnes, quite as eagerly, "he can lay down a rule and follow it! He has been pretty steadily keeping to one particular line of action!"

Alison dared not betray too much interest, but she said "Indeed?" very quickly, and Agnes went on:

"Everyone can see that it might any minute be a match between him and Kitty Egerton, dear little girl, and of course it will come right in the end, but he has something to settle first at the mills. An invention, I believe. He is not one to go empty-handed to any woman!"

Alison felt a cold weight settling upon her as—not perhaps for the first time—this position of Hugh Broderick's was suggested to her mind. This it was then which "kept him back!" He had his ideal, he had found it in the doctor's bright, winsome little daughter, but:

"There is always something," she forced herself to

speaking as easily as possible. "Do married people, I wonder, ever look back, talk over the days of doubt, fear, indecision, which belong, I should think, to every courtship! How delightful to be at one's 'ain fireside' with one you have cared for, and talk over those old anxious, wondering days!"

Agnes said nothing for an instant, but studied her companion's profile earnestly.

"You know, then, even if it is only theory, that companionship is the only basis for married happiness! Fancy what love is like without it—— But, Alison—well, I will not be rude enough to ask questions, only, my dear, when you want to talk, just of yourself, you'll find a very willing listener. In some way, I can't describe it, my dear, you both rest and inspire me!" She ended with her lovely, if half scornful smile.

"Ah!" exclaimed Alison very eagerly; "only let me help! and remember how much a true woman's friendship would be to me!"

"A true woman's!" said Agnes gently. "Am I that, my dear?"

Alison looked at her intently.

"Yes!" she said slowly, gravely; "you are—you will be. But courage, dear, and as you can," she spoke in a low, very gentle voice, "ask better, higher help than mine!"

Agnes did not attempt to answer, nor did her expression change; but her silence, the absolute rigidity of her features, told that some problem was working in her mind. Alas! alas! that the environment should have been so completely human, the misery so much a part of self, the temptation so seductive to the spirit now keenly aroused in Leigh's hitherto tranquil young wife! She felt

as if a weapon had been put into her hands. The question was fast becoming not whether, but how best, at least with what satisfaction to herself, and humiliation to others, to use it!

The entrance gates of Braune House roused both Agnes and Alison from their revery. There was again the feeling of pleasure, not unmixed with some excitement, the enterprise of a new experience in Alison's mind as they went up to the wide door-way, and were admitted into the house by the well-trained servant, who politely called Mrs. Leigh's attention to cards and letters received in her absence. She glanced at them carelessly, opening and flinging them down on the little table until she came to one which she read, and re-read, a color flaming into her delicate cheeks, angrily, proudly scarlet.

"So!" she exclaimed, lifting flashing eyes to Alison's. "My dear," she added hurriedly, and thrusting the letter into the bosom of her dress, "consider yourself well off just at this moment that life, society, friendship, make no demands upon you! Good Heavens! If I were only—for one brief week—day—a man!"

"What then?" said Alison, startled by something in Mrs. Leigh's expression, yet fascinated by the look of power, pride, it gave her slight form and pale young face.

"What then?" she echoed in a low voice, tense with feeling. "I would show the world what women—some women—were and could be; women for whom men seem so ready to barter their honor and their happiness!"

She paused, leaned her hand on the mantel, and bent her head an instant upon it.

"Here," she said suddenly, and drawing the letter from its hiding-place, "I know I can trust you! Read that, and tell me what you think."

Slowly, reluctantly Alison perused the few lines on thick white paper, which desired Mrs. Leigh to take some steps to avoid an open scandal, since the infatuation of her husband for the lovely Mrs. M. was town talk and gossip.

"I think," said Alison slowly, "that it merits what all anonymous communications should receive—silent contempt."

"No," said Agnes thoughtfully; "not in this case, for," she lowered her eyes, ashamed of the admission, "there is, alas! some foundation, some truth," she added, almost in a whisper.

"Then show it at once to your husband!" exclaimed Alison. "Indeed, my first thought was that, and the best."

"No," said Agnes, still speaking almost as though to herself. "It would only put him—them—on their guard!"

"What!" exclaimed Alison; "surely you cannot believe such a thing, Agnes!"

Agnes turned her face toward her now, and Alison saw with swift compassion that hot tears quivered on her lashes.

"Believe it!" she said piteously. "O Alison! If I dared, if I could do otherwise! And how, *how* shall I lead him back! For that is my last, my only hope."

"Then it will, it must come, my dearest friend!" cried Alison, taking both of the other's cold little hands in hers. "If that is your feeling then all must, all will be well!"

"No," answered Agnes, in the same dreary tone she had used before; "I am losing that hope; I am losing all feeling perhaps, and trying to want—revenge!"

"Agnes!" exclaimed Alison eagerly, "think——"

"Hush!" said her companion suddenly. "There is Mrs.

Macneil! I am never safe with that woman! But having been Jack's nurse she claims the privileges of——"

She broke off, glancing coldly at the housekeeper as she approached.

"Well, Mrs. Macneil," she said quietly. "What now?"

"Will Mr. John"—her usual way of referring to the master of the house—"be home for dinner, ma'am?"

"I really cannot tell you," said Agnes steadily, and looking straight into the housekeeper's sedate, expressionless face; "I hardly think so. He is just now at Mrs. Mordaunt's, and will likely remain; so that Miss Fane and I will not wait."

And glancing at Alison she moved toward the staircase, leading the way slowly up the dark, beautiful old staircase to her dainty, many-mirrored dressing-room, where, with a sigh, and a light shrug of her shoulders, she flung herself into a great easy-chair and half consciously tossed the flowers drooping in her belt into the wicker waste basket close at hand.

"Well, Alison," she said suddenly, with a little laugh. "No more of my tragics—heroics! They are not in my line, I'm sure! Come now, let us see what we shall wear for the party here after the concert. I assure you that is of far more importance than my lacerated—pride, just at present."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE morning of the concert dawned brightly enough to satisfy all connected with it, and breakfast over, Agnes and Alison devoted two hours to decorating the lower rooms with the abundant flowers Braune House gardens could offer for such a purpose, Agnes observing, as they worked, that Jack wanted everything to be particularly fine on this occasion, as he was expecting a Washington man of some importance as a special guest.

"And I assure you," said Mrs. Leigh, as she busied herself selecting, from a number, certain long, feathery ferns for a slender vase; "that young man of mine sees everything. Even though he is so chary in marks of approval, he knows what is lacking quickly enough!"

The old house lent itself charmingly to such intention, and Alison fairly reveled in the work with her rich materials at hand. Agnes had gone away for a half hour, as she explained, to "interview and collaborate" with the cook, and Alison, in a sort of recess in the library, was occupied arranging crimson roses in a huge bowl of palest green glaze when footsteps and voices along the hall startled her, and she raised her eyes from the heap of blossoms and deep foliage to behold Broderick's figure, Broderick's face, quiet, but smiling and curiously contented in expression, watching her!

She did not, could not, speak! Agnes, just behind him, laughed.

"Isn't this a surprise!" she said, ushering their unex-

pected visitor in, while Alison came forward from behind the table, wondering if the hot wave of color she felt rushing to her face was as evident to those looking on; and Broderick, provokingly cool, and yet with that amused smile of his, held out his hand.

"We owe this visit to business with my husband," Agnes went on. "So Mr. Broderick very impolitely informed me. He is only here for an hour or two, he says, so we must make the most of him. Oh, he didn't say that, but of course he means it! And, Alison, will you play *chatelaine* while I try and coax Mrs. Macneil to hurry our lunch a little?"

Alison was aware that the instant they were alone Broderick's light manner gave way to a look of very earnest inquiry; and his quick, "Well, Miss Fane, how goes it?" uttered in his kindest tone, was easy to answer.

"Delightfully! Such a house! Such people! It is almost *too* perfect!"

"I knew you would enjoy it," he said, resting his arm on the mantel and gazing down at her, nodding his head with satisfaction. "Do you know, just as you sit there, you make a wonderfully good—what do artists say—effect?"

The girl laughed with pleasure.

"Do I?" she said, that delicious sense of companionship which belonged to all intercourse between them springing up at once, and harmonizing all elements. "This room would lend itself to anything with good effect. Agnes—Mrs. Leigh—is a genius, I assure you."

"Poor girl!" He spoke involuntarily, then looked vexed. "She lost her only child, you know," he added. There was a pause, and Broderick said quietly: "By the way, your friend Miss Benton desired me to tell you for

her she really preferred the quiet day and evening at home; so you were not to look for her."

"What!" exclaimed Alison. "And I did expect her! Is she ill, Mr. Broderick?"

"No, no! She begged you would not think of such a thing. She is only tired, she says, poor girl, of all the factory noise and bustle."

"Ah!" declared Alison, "she is not strong enough for it. I—it must be stopped!"

Broderick looked gravely, fixedly at the girl as she spoke. What a power, an unused force, a strength there was, he fancied, in that young creature; how much as yet undeveloped was suggested in every line of her face, her figure, voice, and gesture, all full of meaning.

"Unfortunately," said Broderick, "where there is bread to win some must toil! I admit your friend is unequal to the task of life set her. Little Kitty Egerton has discovered that!" He smiled.

"She has the doctor's instincts," said Alison, with that unaccountable feeling Kitty's name on his lips produced. "When I go back I will consult Miss Kitty as to what can best be done."

"Do!" he spoke decidedly. "Kate is one in a thousand, and for all her impetuous ways has a cool enough little head about her, I assure you; and she will be a very useful ally. You look wonderfully well yourself," he added rather abruptly; "or is it the reflection of the crimson chair? I fancied you have more color than usual."

She sprang up, and laughingly placed herself against the wall facing him, whose green tones showed her innocent of any but the soft bit of color that came and went at his words.

"So much for effects!" she declared archly, looking up

at his watchful face. "Now, am I dying of consumption, or ready for the ball?"

He smiled half sadly. "You are—yourself," he said, with a tone in which there was certainly some regret; "what you will always be, come what may, nothing else, neither better nor worse! Simply yourself—Alison Fane—there it is!"

"Come now!" cried Alison, shaking her finger at him; "that is a way to compliment a hard-working, self-supporting girl. As a young person of my acquaintance once said: 'How can I be Mary Smith all my life when there's Hiram Bowers a-waiting?' I mean," she added hurriedly, as Broderick's brows were arched and his smile very provoking; "there is always the possible Hiram Bowers, is there not, in one's maiden lot?"

"Precisely! And how it does seem to affect calculations—aspirations——"

"And reduce one's best energies!" put in Alison, who felt decidedly vexed at the turn—"silly," she called it—the conversation through her fault had taken. "I assure you, Mr. Broderick, I have had very different things occupying my mind of late! And to-morrow! Presto! Cinderella will doff her finery and go back to everyday life again."

"Thank Heaven!" he ejaculated.

"I wonder," she said slowly, "if I will ever amount to anything as one of your 'hands,' Mr. Broderick?"

"I doubt it."

"Why so?" He laughed and swept the luxurious, many-hued room with an expressive glance.

"You amount to too much here," he said gravely.

"I know!" exclaimed the girl, her soft eyes kindling. "You think one cannot combine honest toil, good work,

with love of form and color, sweetness of sound. Oh, what a mistake! Don't you, can't you see how they can harmonize? Think of the double lesson of use and beauty nature is teaching us every day, and then answer me, please, what weakness is there in combining our poor little effects harmoniously? Is it, for instance, wrong to care more for this bit of wood"—she laid one of her slim young hands on the black ebony of a shelf near her—"because it has been richly polished by some skilled craftsman whose toil it represents?" She smiled softly. "And these yellow flowers, see how exquisitely they show their tones in that misty Venetian bowl! Oh, come now, Mr. Broderick! If I am a weak-minded lover of the beautiful, you are arrogant, and weak too, in despising it!"

He laughed. "Upon my word," he said quickly; "if I had only known what I could rouse and hear, I would have challenged you to an argument long ago! Meet me, though, on fair ground! Observe, I never said, never even intimated, I despised these things! May not my pulses quicken quite as readily as yours to something as much a part of what you call the beautiful as your glossiest ebony or richest colored flower? It is you who are arrogant, I think, in limiting the boundaries of what is to be admired to a few chairs and so many yards of velvet! My horizon, I assure you, seems a very much wider one!"

"My chairs and yards of color, as you call them," declared Alison; "are only suggestions."

"And my belief in the grand schemes of life, the power, the will, the right to do and be, may look gaunt and bare beside your ideals of the picturesque, but they are, in my eyes at least, beautiful as all the gardens of the Orient, and they represent a universe—man's need, his impetus, work, *achievement*. They cover a great, never ending, all-

suggestive scheme of the Creator, carried out by the creature! Remember I am putting prosaic things in a sublunary way, simply to show you my droning machinery has its grand poetic meaning. I like all this"—he waved his hand toward the objects nearest them. "If I had my way, my ideal life, it might be ten hours a day of work among my fellow-men in all its prosaic and yet vast detail; the rest—here!"

A smile, half sad, half weary, touched his lips, and Alison, ashamed of her apparent inability to understand the grand simplicity of the man, said softly:

"You can teach me a fine, inspiring sort of doctrine! Don't despair of me as a pupil!" She lifted her face and looked at him with an exquisite sort of shyness. "I never knew," she went on; "how much I had, I could learn, until I met you! And, Mr. Broderick," she drew nearer. "Don't give me up! You can help me, and I need it!"

"*I!*" said Broderick, in a low, vibrant tone, gazing searchingly down. "It would be a strange world if I gave you up, unasked! Have I so much, do you think, my child, in my lonely life that I would forego the pleasure of—may I call it the friendship, you offer! Am I so rich, so royal a being socially as that?"

Alison had moved back a little; her heart was beating swiftly with its impulse to say something which was on her mind, but beating against her very heart-strings; and with an effort which made her pale to the lips, and the objects in the beautiful room for an instant dim before her eyes, she said in a low tone:

"You are so blind! In all this time—all your life at Exeford—have you never seen the prize your life might have, can now include?"

There was dead silence for an instant between them;

and it seemed to Alison as though he must hear those slow, great throbs of her heart, must know what this was costing her! Meanwhile Broderick, without moving a muscle, looked at her fixedly.

"What?" he said at last in a harsh, dull tone.

"A man never values the love of the best woman, it is said," she went on slowly, some fascination keeping her eyes fixed on his face. "Why not put your fate to the test? Kate—Kitty Egerton——"

She broke off because of the strange look which sprang into his face; just what it implied she could not understand, and already she felt half alarmed and dismayed at having gone so far, but Broderick apparently realized her difficulty, and not releasing her from his intent gaze said calmly:

"If you are mistaken, and I think you are, I thank you all the same for having made the suggestion."

There was a pause during which, while Alison looked nervously away from him, she heard him draw a long breath, almost of pain.

"We are in a fair way of keeping our compact—you remember it?—rather too closely if we order each other's lives in this fashion," he said presently, and with an easy assumption of cheerfulness. "However, there is, there must be, always an inner core no one but one's self can ever reach, something 'never written, never sung'—and yet the essence of real companionship surely lies in accepting this understanding that it exists—and in that way sympathizing with it without asking to know more."

Alison was silent. Presently Broderick went on, the queer look of pain she had only once or twice seen there darkening his eyes.

"It is in that—what shall we say—solitude of the soul

we work out our best problems. Then comes the moment when we seek, crave for the one human, kindred spirit—is it not—who shall hear our results, our hopes, ideas, and understand what must have gone before!”

He smiled down upon the girl, whose face was still pale, and very grave in its expression.

“And if—we have no such one!”

“Ah!” said Broderick quickly; “God help us! That comes to more than one of us, Alison, every day! But better that than the ashes of a mistaken trust, the coldness of a fire that has burned itself all out. And I maintain that life still holds in itself enough to work with, work for, even by such a cheerless hearthstone.”

“Perhaps,” said Alison slowly. She looked at his grave, strong face earnestly, wondering if he had indeed reduced feeling to such a cold, practical, and cheerless level, but his smile answered her; it seemed to forbid the subject any further discussion, and Alison, just a little nettled and annoyed, gave a light shrug to her shoulders and moved away from the becoming drapery of pale green, saying carelessly: “After this when I want calm, cold, useful philosophy, I shall come to you! I believe you could chill me with one sentence.”

“Shall I answer that?” he returned quickly. “No; I will leave what I might say to your imagination, which I think is quite active enough without words of mine.”

Alison opened her lips to speak, but the portière was moved and Agnes, very bright and evidently in a cheery frame of mind, appeared, simultaneously with the announcement luncheon was ready. Jack’s voice in the hall, his prompt appearance, and welcome of their guest effectually ended what had been, to Alison at least, a most tantalizing *tête-à-tête*, and as she took her place opposite Broderick,

at the luxuriously appointed table, she was most disagreeably conscious both of having acquitted herself very badly, and that he seemed to have entirely dismissed the matter from his mind, entering eagerly into "shop" talk with their host, showing his keen, masterly view of mill affairs in a way that would have astonished anyone who thought of him merely as one of Gorman's hands, and rousing Jack into an unusual degree of eloquence in combating some of his guest's opinions which evidently interested Agnes keenly. What would she not have given, poor girl, to have called up an equal amount of fire or even animation in her own conversations with him, which of late had become such mere abstract exchange of necessary remarks on matters of social or home importance which could not be otherwise decided? More than once Agnes asked herself whether she had, and was going the right way to work, and when Jack, insisting there was time, carried Broderick off to the library to show him a new drawing of machinery which had been sent in, Agnes turned to Alison with a little sigh and smile together:

"How well those two talk!" she exclaimed. "Jack is always surprising me! Of course one may expect anything of a head like Broderick's. By the way, I could not help noticing one or two little things to-day which make me surer than ever the man is bred a gentleman."

"Born or bred—or however—he is one!" said Alison almost angrily; "and I declare, although I could not help seeing how admirably he became his surroundings, yet I think I like him quite as well in his workshop at the mills!"

"Ah, but you, you," cried Agnes, playfully pinching her companion's soft little cheek; "you are such a hopeless democrat!"

"You know nothing about it," cried Alison, with her gayest laugh. "I have been called cursed with fastidiousness, now then, by your very high and mighty Mr. Broderick himself. Yes, my dear, those were his words, in one of his positively rare fits of temper."

"Upon my word! I'd really like to know the occasion."

"Oh, you are welcome to it! I refused absolutely and entirely to wear a particularly hideous drab apron he was obliging enough to get me my first day in the factory. I said it would take all the animation out of my work. For an instant he simply stared, then laughed, and then said that."

"And the apron?"

"Oh, I never wore it, of course. I did without for that day and brought a black one—very sedate and business-like looking—the next day. He sniffed, but he didn't say anything. Oh"—Alison broke off to laugh gleefully. and continued with a very pretty color—"a day or two later he came in to the workroom with a black silk cap he wears pushed back on his head, in a really most becoming fashion. Short as he keeps his hair it will wave, you know, Agnes, and I was looking at it, and thinking my gentleman didn't know how 'fetching,' as Mr. Leigh says, he appeared, when he observed dryly that he supposed were I in his place I wouldn't wear such a cap for worlds, and I remarked it was well he was so keen a mind reader! Do you know, Agnes, although of course he wouldn't admit it—grand mogul that he wishes to be—it really did vex him, and I had to admire his pluck in never budging it off his curly head, for we all know what man's vanity is. He wears it straight along!"

"He is a peculiar combination," said Agnes. "I admit I'd give much to discover the weak places in his armor,

for of course they exist, and then pierce them through and through. What a magnificent spectacle he'd be thoroughly in love!"

Alison, with the flicker of a smile, shook her head.

"I don't think so," she answered; "simply because he wouldn't betray it at all!"

"He would, some way," declared Agnes. "Come, there they are, Alison. Well, Mr. Broderick, so you can't really stay any longer?"

But Broderick declared himself a trifle late as it was. If, in bidding her good-by, he held Alison's cool little fingers half an instant longer than those of their hostess, it was only to say:

"Now don't worry about your friend. I promise to notify you if she is ill. Go ahead, enjoy yourself, and come back with that color in your cheeks—if only to glove-making!"

And then, the two girls watching him from the doorway, Broderick, with Jack Leigh at his side, went down the poplar-lined avenue, once just half turning his head back in Alison's direction.

CHAPTER XXVII.

EVERYTHING was excitement and pleasurable confusion for the next hour. Celia Kane, with an immense roll of music, appeared early and indicated a good place for the piano in the long drawing-room, objecting to Agnes' first suggestion of the hall; most of the principals, very important, talkative, or rather discursive, arrived next, and Alison, who was well aware of what Agnes was feeling even while she flitted about exchanging pleasant words here and there, listening most attentively to all Mr. Ogden-thorpe had to say and altering certain trifles at his suggestion, found herself waiting, as she well knew Agnes was, Mrs. Mordaunt's arrival. It so chanced, however, that Tasia appeared with half a dozen others, and the greetings were general. Mr. Leigh was not present, and Mr. Ogden-thorpe, directly his other favored "prima donna" was *en évidence*, rushed everyone to business. Celia's value was apparent at once. In her quiet, if heavy, methodical way, she reduced whatever was confused to system, and in a short time the spirit of music infected everyone. Mrs. Mordaunt, after a superb rendering of her principal solo, drifted away from the piano with a languid acknowledgment of the professor's "Brava," and approached Alison, who was at once inwardly on the alert, and prepared to do battle! Some curious, antagonistic feeling possessing her directly the young widow came within her orbit!

"Dear Miss Fane," she said in her gentle, half drawling

voice, "won't you be very, very good and let me have a cup of tea up in your room? My poor head is nearly wild! And I want to be bright this evening!"

It was of course impossible to refuse such a request, and Alison could only explain it to Agnes, conduct the languid Tasia up to her dainty bower, and allow her to make herself charmingly picturesque as well as comfortable in a deep, chintz-covered lounging chair. A wood fire crackling on the hearth sent up cheerful flame and color, the servant who carried in the tea tray instinctively acknowledged the importance of Alison's beautiful guest by drawing the round table near to where she was seated and arranging the dainty little *goulée* with a view to her especial comfort and convenience, while Alison declining all but a cup of the fragrant "Japan" itself, put her cup down on a large table at a distance and made a pretence of picking out some stitches in a bit of fancy-work on hand, well aware that Tasia had a motive in the *tête-à-tête* which would come out quicker if she "forced her hand" by silently keeping her own.

"Are you always busy?" Mrs Mordaunt said finally.

Alison looked up, laughed, and shook her head. "Oh, no! I merely keep a bit of this work about as an accompaniment to thought when I'm discussing something with myself, though I enjoy some kinds of sewing greatly."

"And you are 'discussing,' as you call it, considerably, I imagine."

"I am!"

"Dear me! I wish I had a head like yours! Now I have to fall back upon other people's wits when I need counsel, or indeed," sighed Tasia; "when I need to even understand other people!"

"What a pity!" observed Alison dryly. She pondered

a moment how best to hasten what was evidently to be the *dénouement* of all this preamble. "Are you solving any problems just now?"

Tasia laughed. Low and musical as her voice was, there was a note in her laughter which jarred directly upon Alison's nerves and made her, as she said, "only combative" again.

"Yes; I am trying to," Mrs. Mordaunt said, evidently a trifle nettled by her companion's tone or manner. "Just now, Miss Fane, you interest me as a problem—you see I am willing to be frank—as a peculiar addition altogether to this harmonious household! Don't look indignant; not yet, any way. Believe me, it will be just as well to understand each other!" She sat upright now, leaning her elbow on the chair, her cheek on her hand, and looked at Alison with a cool, deliberate expression in which there was something Alison shrank from, yet confessed gave this woman her peculiar power, nerve, whatever that may be called which is wholly lacking in anything of the heart, yet dangerously, cleverly in harmony with the head—the powers of the mind.

"You are the friend, the champion, let us say, of our poor dear Agnes! Don't you think now you might advise her to be a trifle more judicious than she is just at present? Ah! I see you understand me!" Tasia laughed, a little silvery ripple whose sound reached no further than the room-door itself. "My dear child, do you know that I, woman of the world that I am, would give, I dare not say how much, for your spirit and your capacity for an honest blush!" She half stifled a yawn, rose, gazed deliberately, coolly at herself in the hanging mirror, then turned back as she continued: "I daren't say how long it is since anything but vexation, anger, perhaps, made me change

color like that! And it is so captivating! so fresh and youthful."

Alison made no answer except by a very faint smile, and her guest, flinging herself into the deep easy-chair again, went on:

"I am—let me see—twenty—twenty-seven years of age. Don't say anything, I know I don't look it. I never will look my age, I suppose. Nevertheless, such is the fact, and I assure you, my dear child, for at least twenty years of my life I have been in search of sensations!"

Alison laughed, really, merrily, and with unaffected amusement.

"What a career!" she exclaimed. "Positively you are worth listening to! Think of starting out at—when did you say—seven years of age in search of what any four-wheel cab could have produced by running over you!"

"Nonsense! Are you really such a prosaic little creature! I don't believe it! I've wanted something to amuse, interest, stimulate me. Above all things I've always wanted whatever was unattainable."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Alison, quite serious enough now. "That is of all creeds, if one may call it so, the most objectionable, disheartening, foolish, and weak! What! you simply care for what you cannot—or shall I say," the girl's gray eyes flashed a queer look upon her companion, "what you should not have?"

A brief pause, during which neither glance wavered; then Tasia, with a little sorrowful lift of her head, said calmly:

"Precisely! There is one satisfaction in talking to you: you neither mince matters nor are you slow to understand."

"Thanks!"

"Exactly! My life has been, people say, a—well, brilliant one. I'd sketch it for you, but perhaps my way of doing it would frighten such a little bundle of feelings and Puritanism mixed as you are! However, briefly speaking, let me tell you what it has been in a general way: My parents were society people, not at all well enough off to keep up the sort of appearances they considered due their position, and I assure you it was a wild sort of a scramble at times to be up to the mark when really poor dad—he was the best-hearted creature on earth—owed every tradesman who would or had trusted him for a farthing. Jack's aunt, or uncle rather, was his creditor on more occasions than one, and I assure you the old man knew how to turn the screws on at the right moment for his own advantage! When I think of some of the ways in which the Fairfax money was made I—well! never mind. However, we girls, my sister Bess and I, were taught from the earliest hour we could understand the lesson that Money—all in capitals—must be obtained by marriage! Poor little Bess! She hadn't a bit of pluck—no kind of stamina! Our revered Grandmamma Willets could crush anything like opposition out of her in a moment, and when she, poor child, fell in love with Dick Harriman, who hadn't a penny, nor more than an ounce of brains, there was such a time that I can assure you, my child, I trembled when I thought of every extra dance or soft word I'd given Peter Knowlton, the best-looking, best-natured fellow in the world—except Jack Leigh, perhaps, who was about at the time as well, but not in the market. If Jack had—well, never mind. Poor little Bessie's tragic love affair completely frightened me out of indulging in anything of the kind——"

As Mrs. Mordaunt paused, Alison, who in spite of all

repulsion for her companion's absolutely heartless way of recalling the past, had a natural, girlish interest in the story said: "Did she marry him then?" and Tasia, with a half sigh, continued:

"Oh, yes! and they were very properly miserable. They ran away, at least walked out and got married the very day of the Vandorns' famous ball, and were there as innocent-looking as you please that evening, and no one the wiser! Only when we came down to breakfast in the morning—very late, of course—there was no Miss Bessie! Only the conventional little letter saying good-by, etc., and how much she loved her husband, and hoped we'd all very soon be good friends! Poor Bess! spelling never was her forte, and I remember how we laughed over two or three of the most important words in that artless effusion. Well, I mustn't keep you here all day; of course we didn't entirely throw them over; to begin with, it would have made too much talk—but we never could pretend to approve in any way—and Bess! why, in two years' time you wouldn't have known her!"

"In what way?"

"Why, my dear, she simply settled down into—why, just into Dick Harriman's wife!"

Alison really gave vent to an unrestrained laugh.

"Misguided young Bessie!" she exclaimed.

"Why, I wish you could have seen them," declared her companion, the corners of her exquisite mouth curving in scorn at the recollection. "They had a poky little flat! They had a—well, apology for a maid of all work, and when I think how careful Bess used to be of her hands! I assure you they were red from actual housework. I actually believe she cooked and scrubbed. Sometimes they didn't have the green creature of a girl at all, and no

nurse for her baby when it was a month old! Of course they never went anywhere! How could they?"

"And, I suppose," observed Alison; "they were very unhappy and he abused her, of course, and she became fretful and thin, like the poor foolish wives in story-books who marry for love."

Mrs. Mordaunt laughed. "I wish I knew just how to take you, Alison Fane," she said, with a shrewd look. "No, I can't say Bessie's health or spirits suffered much, and Dick Harriman couldn't abuse any created, living thing! Oh, no, it wasn't that; they're jogging along in their own dull kind of way yet—poor Bess!"

Alison did not answer, and the shadow on Mrs. Mordaunt's face deepened again as she continued:

"Well, then, you can quite understand what would have been the result of my setting up an opinion when Mr. Mordaunt appeared. And really," she added, with a very dispassionate manner, "I might have done a great deal worse! His age was about all there was positively against him. Of course Grandma Willets had both her old eyes very wide open, and when Mr. Mordaunt gave her a judicious hint she sent for me. I knew perfectly well what was coming. Except on our regulation duty visits we never went to see grandmamma unless for a talking to—or a talking at, you might better say. So I was all prepared for my little court of investigation. I made up my mind, however, I'd get some fun out of it, so for a while I parried and bluffed her, and wouldn't see what she was at. Then when I forced her to come right to the point and tell me that Mr. Mordaunt had 'led her to infer,' etc., his intentions, I hemmed and hawed, and said I'd have to think it over, and he mustn't hurry me, and then—upon my word, she is a wonderfully shrewd woman—grand-

mamma looked at me very fixedly and said dryly that there was, no doubt, some other silly affair dangling, and I might just as well, first as last, understand that in my case a repetition of Bessie's nonsense would not be tolerated. With my looks—my dear, you see they were too long discussed like other commodities to leave me the least reserve or modesty on the subject—something worth while was expected; and, moreover, she knew I was a different mould from my younger sister, she said”—a queer look flitted over the beautiful cold face—“I need not pretend to any heart in the matter. What nature did not give no one could ask for; but, said she, what you will get is most of all I have to leave when I die, and the diamond and pearl parure on your wedding day. I never, to do myself credit, had had the least intention of declining Mr. Mordaunt's very good-natured proposal! but you see, my child, how wise it is to meet people on their own ground. Had I jumped at my good fortune, grandmamma would never have dreamed of giving me those jewels right out, and they're famous everywhere; wait until you see some of them to-night!”

“It was a fair exchange then,” said Alison, who had gone through half a dozen phases of feeling while this narrative was in progress, and felt now mainly anxious to know whether the beautiful, heartless creature before her could be made to feel the repellent side to the story.

“Well, yes,” admitted Tasia; “for, really, Mr. Mordaunt was by no means a bad husband, as men of the world go. He was always civil unless he was—and, well, I never had to see him if anything was at all out of the way, and he never had reason to find fault with me. You see, I knew that, easy-going as he appeared, he would not have tolerated the least nonsense on my part.”

“An excellent reason for behaving yourself,” said Ali-

son, and Tasia, with another dubious, searching look, said confidently:

"Oh, I assure you I was most discreet! No one could have complained of anything. Why, even in regard to Bessie—I scarcely ever went near her."

"Really! Well, it is to be hoped Mr. Mordaunt was properly appreciative," said Alison.

"Oh, yes, indeed! He was always liberal, and he died in about—well, very nearly two years, and left me very comfortable, and I'm sure he had nothing to complain of in his—I mean if he knew of it—the funeral."

"How consoling," said Alison; "and your singing—did he enjoy that?"

"Oh, yes! Well, if anything bothered him, perhaps it was a fear I might want to go on the stage. He was consoled, however, when this very Mr. Ogdenhorpe told him I lacked—what is it—the *timbre*—you know that stagey sort of feeling or whatever it is Agnes has in her voice."

"No," said Alison, perfectly calmly; "it's soul with Agnes, that is all; it doesn't reach everyone, of course."

Tasia laughed lightly. "You're so funny!" she commented. "Well, now I really must not keep you here longer," she rose, shook out her draperies, indulged in another little satisfactory survey of herself in the mirror, and observed, with her pretty smile:

"I'd be a year making you out! But you're very deep, my dear. I wonder who could quite fathom you? That superior Mr. Broderick, perhaps? I hear you are great friends."

"Yes," said Alison; "I hope we are friends, for I respect him well enough to wish him one."

"You're so shrewd," said Tasia presently, and going

back to the main subject of their *tête-à-tête*, "I wonder you haven't found out about Jack and Agnes yet."

The color flamed into Alison's fine, pure young face, and for an instant she was tempted to let prudence go and say all she felt, but her respect for Agnes and Agnes' trouble was too great. She forced back the words which were on her lips and said very coldly:

"Has it not occurred to you, Mrs. Mordaunt, that as we are both Mrs. Leigh's guests, discussion of her is rather out of place?"

Tasia was silent; her eyes held a little cruel shaft of light in them, but she forced herself to smile as she said carelessly:

"You are quite right; and the subject has exhausted itself. Shall we go down now? The good Ogdenthorpe and that remarkable Miss Kane will be looking for us."

"No doubt," said Alison quietly. She touched the bell near the fireplace, held back the portière for her guest to pass out ahead of her, and followed her down the wide staircase with a most uncomfortable, irritated feeling. Silly, weak-minded, even empty-headed as the bewitching Tasia might be, Alison was very well aware that her balance of cold shrewdness was a heavy one, and would enable her to make things decidedly uncomfortable if she felt so inclined, but the *tête-à-tête* had been in one way successful. By inducing her to talk of herself, Alison had kept clear of topics nearer home, and Tasia had so thoroughly revealed her own shallowness that our heroine was all the more firmly arrayed on the side of Agnes in trying to dissociate herself and her household from such unwholesome social influences—the word friendship could not be spoken in this connection! More and more clearly were the influences, the very creed of a simple daily life, in

which were neither complications nor entanglements, sentimentality, nor affectations of feeling, "sensations," as Tasia defined her love of excitement, nor false estimates of the things which make up the sum total of one's life and happiness, forcing themselves upon our heroine as all that was worth striving for, and she wished Broderick and she had come to a better understanding of each other in their recent talk, since she was quite sure she at least understood the principle of his doctrine, his ennobling, if severe social code.

"But he is so—he cares so little what I think or not!" was the girl's final reflection. "He has probably forgotten every word of it all by this time. I wonder what he would have said to Mrs. Mordaunt's very frank recital!"

But all such suggestions had to give way now before the final decisions, announcements, discussions for the evening. Jack Leigh had put in an appearance, and was listlessly talking to the plebeian, music-loving Celia Kane with his very kindest manner when Alison and her companion re-entered the drawing room, and he detached himself as speedily as possible from the young pianist, sauntering toward Mrs. Mordaunt with an easy smile and the "Well, all right, madame?" which in its lack of ceremony was more expressive of their familiar way with each other than anything else, while Alison made all haste to engross Agnes' attention in regard to some points in her solo for the evening.

They were gone at last, and Agnes turned at once to her husband.

"Weren't you late, Jack?" she asked very gently.

Jack smiled. "Why, yes, a trifle. By the way, Gray Gorman will be over here to-night, especially to see Mr.

Winstane (the Washington gentleman). Can we put him up, do you think?"

Agnes' face flushed, but she said hastily:

"No, I'm sorry, but it can't be managed. If he doesn't return let him go to the hotel. Oh, but I'm tired! What are you going to do, Alison? I must have a rest before the concert."

And she swept her friend along with her, leaving Jack to his paper before the great crackling fire, hesitating at the door of her pretty room a moment, then saying lightly: "No, I won't be selfish! Go away and lie down for an hour or two. Jane will bring you up some flowers to wear to-night; make yourself lovely enough to capture—— There, I won't say another word!"

And with a light, sweet laugh, painfully touching in its effort to hide her deeper feelings, Agnes stood still watching Alison disappear in the direction of her own room. Then, sure that she was unobserved, Jack's wife moved softly back to the bend of the wide staircase, and looked down into the hall where he was still sitting.

He had tired very quickly of his paper. It had fallen to the ground, and his hands were clasped behind his head as he leaned back, gazing down into the leaping, dying flames. Not a sound but the ticking of the tall old clock in the corner, the occasional break and fall of a bit of fire-wood, was audible, and Agnes, her very heart seeming on her lips, hesitated, wavered, waited, fought with an eager longing to go down, kneel beside him and—open all of her tender, loving, really loyal heart! The pendulum of the great clock swung back and forth, one, two, three minutes of time, passed on—three minutes in which, half from a foolish pride, half dreading how he might receive, or chill her, Agnes let an opportunity worth more than hours or

days before and later, drift by. With something like a sigh, or quickly drawn breath, Jack rose, stretched himself, snapped his fingers at the great St. Bernard, who came slowly, affectionately toward him, and with this dumb but loving companion at his heels went over to his special "den" near the library, opened the door, closing it upon himself and old Marco with a sharp, thin sound, the last for some time to disturb the perfect quiet of the house.

Agnes moved slowly, noiselessly, with a sense of miserable oppression, regret, defeat once more at her heart as she re-entered her beautiful room, more completely alone than she had felt for days. Meanwhile, in the solitude of the library, the master of the house had plunged into the examination of business papers, drawings of new machinery, etc., and was wondering within himself whether "the game of his life" were "worth the candle." "No one cares a rap," he was thinking; "still, one must have an object in life. Heigh-ho! and only four years ago Agnes and I began this sorry business rather differently! Poor little Nell! If we—I—had her to work for!"

Almost involuntarily the young fellow glanced about the room, reassured himself that old Marco was his only witness, then unlocking a special drawer in his desk took out a box, thence drew forth a small velvet-framed case, a miniature, the portrait of his child.

"Better off, my poor little girl!" Jack said to himself, as he replaced the case after gazing lovingly upon it. He rose once more with an effort to rouse or "pull himself together," and then he stood thinking for a moment, gazing down into the bright fire. "I wonder," his thoughts went on, "just where! It must be God has a home for such as she was. I wonder if it was my turn——" He

hesitated, then calling: "Come on, Marco, come, old fellow!" flung himself down on the sofa, the dog crouched on the floor at his side, and the next hour passed in vain efforts, first to go on with the latest novel brought in, then to enjoy an afternoon *siesta*, upon both of which queer visions, bits of the afternoon talk, music, suggestions were persistently obtruded until actual drowsiness, indeed, physical weariness, the result of much broken rest of late, won the day, and Jack slept on for the next hour, dreaming Broderick was discussing the rights and wrongs of some mill question with him to the tune of the quickly running engine, while Alison Fane was standing by with that handsome, reserved friend of hers, Hilda Benton, and his own wife.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

YOUTH, good natural spirits, and a clear conscience go far in this world to create happiness out of slender materials, and our heroine fortunately possessed all three requisites to make the prospect of the evening a most delightful one. Whatever hint of sadness "lurked unseen" she determined should be put to one side at least, and she enjoyed,—as what girl among my readers would not have done?—making as becoming a toilet as possible for the concert and social gathering to follow at Braune House.

Dressed in a pretty gown of white crepon, a "remnant," she called it, of "former greatness," with her grandmother's necklace and bracelets of pearls on her round young throat and arms, her hair in its usual high, soft coil, with the little vagrant lovelocks on her brow, the young girl needed only the touch of color given by the deep-hued carnations and soft green maidenhair which the obliging house-maid brought her to make her evening toilet charming, simple, becoming, and in keeping with her youth, the dark tones of hair and eyes, the clear fairness of her skin with its flitting pink color in the cheeks. A thrill of pleasure, gayety, hard to say just what elements, combined to make up a sensation wholly delightful, and to give sparkle to her face and a happy look to her eyes and lips, as she made her way down the great staircase, surprised to find Jack already waiting in the hall—as usual a trifle nervously impatient over his wife's delay.

"Well done!" he exclaimed, smiling at Alison as she hesitated an instant on the lower bend of the stairs, her white and furred wraps over one arm, the free hand resting on the shining dark balustrade. "Upon my word, Alison, you're worth photographing as you stand there! I declare, I'll begin a series of pictures again in the old house."

"Oh, do!" exclaimed Alison, coming down a trifle hurriedly; "if I were in your place, Mr. Leigh, I'd—oh, I'd never have an idle moment, nor a dull one!"

"Wouldn't you?" he laughed shortly. "I'd like to know your rules and follow them for a week."

"Rules!" Alison's dainty brows were arched. "There should be none! Method, perhaps—rules never!"

"What then—where would your method come in?"

"Let every day have certain hours for certain kinds of things: say three or four for photography, reading, music, visiting one's neighbor; then let each day decide which branch should be pursued in the appointed time."

"I see; not a bad idea." He paused, looked gravely down into the fire, then up the staircase. "Where on earth is Agnes?" he exclaimed. "She never can be on time!"

And at the same moment the boudoir door was heard to close, the rustle of Agnes' drapery made a soft *frou-frou* along the hall, and she appeared, radiant in rich dark green velvet, a trifle heavy, perhaps, for her slender form, but suiting her height and peculiarly graceful carriage admirably. The pallor of her face was noticeable to both Jack and Alison as she came slowly downstairs, the diamonds flashing on her neck, in her small white ears, an arrow-shaped pin fastening one side of her brown hair, singularly becoming, yet intensifying the cold white look of her sweet young face.

"You are stunning in that gown!" declared Alison, and as Agnes smiled languidly Jack added:

"Is it the green that makes you so pale, Aggie?"

Her eyes flashed a look at him, a smile in them, poor child!

"Am I pale? Well, in any case the singing always makes me white as a sheet," she said lightly, and with something almost timid held out her slim gloved hand for her young "lord and master" to fasten the last two refractory buttons.

"Remember the first time I did this?" he said, smiling.

She laughed and nodded her head quickly.

"Don't I, though! You pretended you didn't know how! And you tried——"

"Yes!" He looked over his shoulder at their guest. "Just think of it, Alison, and beware of young men: I tried when I'd buttoned the glove to fasten a kiss in with it. You see, I had her hand—like this."

He held it, bent down, and touched the bit of palm above the buttons lightly with his lips.

"When you were—my sweetheart, eh, Jack?" said Agnes softly. "A million, million years ago!" She turned, gathered up her rich draperies, the carriage was announced, and Alison and her host and hostess, all rather silent and preoccupied, drove away rapidly to the great hall where Exeford's "event," as the daily paper called it, was to take place.

Exeford, having "created" the festival, never allowed it to come or go unmarked by triumph, and this occasion was only one of a series wherein success had become almost commonplace; but Alison, whose knowledge of the resources of her own country was necessarily meagre, was roused into positive enthusiasm by the fine way in which every-

thing was done, and even the hypercritical Ogdenthorpe was compelled to look and bow his own appreciation more than once, since, with two such voices as Tasia Mordaunt's and Agnes Leigh's as "principals," approval went without saying, and the choruses were brilliant, effective, and, if a trifle too metallic now and then, at all events admirably trained and clearly intelligent.

Never could Alison forget the—to her mind—chief *encore* of the evening, nor the look on Agnes' flower-like, exquisite face as she sang that perfect message of earth to heaven: "Angels ever bright and fair." Long afterward the notes rested, lingered, echoed in a sad, lonely recess of the girl's heart; the "*Take, oh, take me to thy care*" was like a petition from the longing, restless soul to those winged messengers of heaven in whose train came mercy, tenderness, love, and rest. The momentary hush which followed was intensely felt, then the applause burst forth. Twice Agnes had to bow, smile, half shake her head before she was allowed to return to her seat in spite of the very clearly printed request on every programme that *encores* should not be insisted upon.

"It is the one way to absolute self-forgetfulness," declared Agnes as they were driving homeward through the starlit, tranquil streets. "How are we ever to define the feeling music gives us to ears born deaf to its impressions! Come, Alison! Your face over there has a rapt sort of expression worth translating. Hasn't it, Jack?"

"Alison's look is always worth that," he said good-humoredly. Something about his wife evidently disturbed or interested him this evening, he watched her so closely.

" 'The harmony of immortal souls,' " quoted Alison. "I always feel that we who love music in this way can never get to its height or depth while this 'vesture of

decay' doth close us in. It is the expression of what we never find, or quite reach, or even understand."

"But, oh, how it relieves the need of expression!" said Agnes softly, and turning her eyes to the flitting picture of the night. Jack leaned forward, fastened a jewelled pin in her hair, and said in a half jesting way:

"Agnes, you ought to be very grateful to me. Young woman,"—she turned, and he went on,—“if I had humored you in your fancy for a public life, you would have been—*wretched*."

She looked at him with a strange expression.

"My fancy, as you call it, Jack, my dear, may be only put aside. Take care!"

And Agnes felt sure she at least understood what the caution implied.

"Here—at last!" exclaimed Jack as the great doors of Braune House opened to reveal its friendly lights; the fine hall brilliant with lamps, the glowing fire, flowers profuse and fragrant on all sides, the conservatory doors thrown open, made a picture framed in the starlight night worthy such a setting.

"Home!" said Leigh as he sprang to the ground, and turned to assist the two ladies. "Now, then, for our private concert!"

Half an hour later the rooms and hall were filled with a gayly laughing and talking company. Alison found herself, after a very impressive introduction from Mr. Leigh himself, with "the guest of the evening," the "Washington man," a Mr. Winstane, who interested her at once, combining the shrewdness of the natural-born financier and statesman with the polish of a man long accustomed to the ebb and flow of society in great capitals; and while they drank a cup of coffee together in the library,—Alison

rather surprising him by declining even claret-cup among the various beverages provided,—she surprised him almost into speechlessness by saying she was one of Gorman's "hands."

"Are you not jesting?" Colonel Winstane asked, his sharp gray eyes under their heavy brows taking in afresh the quiet elegance, the fair, high-bred look, of the girl so evidently a favored guest at "Braune." "Do you mean me to understand, Miss Fane," he continued, completely puzzled, "that you work in the factory?"

She smiled, a look of mischief in her eyes and dimples.

"I am on hand at 6 A. M., Colonel Winstane," she answered; "and although our—what do they call him—boss, Mr. Broderick, would tell you I am a very incapable sort of a person, I assure you I rarely leave until the closing bell has rung its last stroke."

"But——" He stopped short; he really knew not what to say; then added, with a peculiar smile: "So Broderick bullies you, does he, like everyone else?"

She laughed. "When I let him! I believe he regards me as something to be reformed. He scolds me often enough to improve me."

"Do you know him well? He is one—to my way of thinking—one of the master minds in America; something has unhinged him, I am sure, or he would have long since taken the place he deserves. Broderick is one to be led to great heights under the right influence."

"And—without it?" Alison felt her heart quickening as she spoke.

"He will never go down; the man has too much natural uplifting power for that. But I've often wondered what he would do with—wealth, for instance."

"And so have I," exclaimed Alison quickly; "often.

Tell me, How do you think he would use the *power* we know that money surely gives. You can't deny that, of course."

"I never wanted to," said Colonel Winstane shortly. "It is by such arguments our philanthropists harm their cause. How Broderick would use it?" He turned the tiny spoon of gold and silver up and down in its dainty Sèvres cup as he reflected upon a fitting answer to Alison's question.

"He would like, no doubt, to remodel the whole universe," he said at last, bringing his shrewd smile back to the eager young face before him; "and yet I think that level head of his would make him see that concentration was better than anything else, and I don't doubt he'd try to take hold of Gorman's, for instance, and make a model factory of it."

Alison, who had followed every word as anxiously as though it was the verdict of a jury, nodded her head slowly and said: "Yes, I think that probable; but he expects so much. He is so—intolerant."

"Does he often find the—tolerable?" said the Washington man, with a smile. "Isn't our average workman and woman,—mill hand, for instance,—a very sordid, dull piece of material?"

"No," declared Alison. "I think not. They work well, cheerfully enough, and their demands, as I see them, are only just. If in some cases they will despise their employers, it is surely not without reason. They have no reason for making mere slaves, machines of themselves. Were I, to-morrow, for example, to think I could better myself by leaving Gorman's and going to another factory, I would not hesitate for one instant in doing so. The core of the whole thing, on both sides, is supremely selfish."

"Then why blame Broderick?"

"Because—oh——" She held up a warning finger as Gray Gorman, faultlessly dressed, certainly looking very handsome and easy in his air, sauntered toward them from the hall.

The picture of his father's "hand" occupied in what was evidently a very spirited debate with the most important person present that evening surprised him out of his usual faculty for "ignoring" Alison's "pretensions," as he considered her look, bearing, and perfectly quiet but thoroughly self-possessed manner. He held out his hand, smiled, and saying: "Charming place, isn't it, Miss Fane?" leaned back against a heavy table, and looked up at the "great man" on mill questions, who he considered had spent time enough with this provokingly independent young woman.

"Well, Winstane, how goes it?" he asked lazily. "I suppose we'll see you upstairs for a while before we break up."

And as the Washingtonian made some half-audible answer, Alison took advantage of the break in their own *tête-à-tête* to excuse herself and leave the room.

"Charming, delightful girl that!" exclaimed Colonel Winstane when they were alone. "By Jove, you're a queer mixture up here, Gorman! She tells me she's one of your hands."

Gorman nodded. "That's so, and a very stupid one at that."

"Why, what on earth does *she* want to make gloves for?" demanded the colonel with his back to the fire. "She has brains and fire and go enough in her for something very different!"

"I wish I could enlighten you, my dear fellow,"

exclaimed Gorman, with his short laugh. "I own the girl puzzles me; and she's connected with all these people, you know." He sketched what he knew of Alison's family relations.

"Queer," observed the colonel. "I thought that sort of thing belonged to the 'penny dreadfuls.'"

"H'm—what?" inquired young Gorman. "She's a regular chum of Agnes'—Mrs. Leigh's," he added; then rather quickly: "Well, Winstane, I think we've about 'got onto' Clyde at last; and that fellow Broderick is—well, he is busy with something which I hear will open all our eyes."

And for the next half hour the conversation was distinctly business in its nature. Sounds of music reached them from time to time; once Gorman stopped in the midst of what he was saying as the tones of Agnes' voice floated toward them, and as Winstane said something extremely complimentary Gorman answered, with his shrewd look:

"Stagey, isn't it? By Jove! there's a fortune there if she only knew it."

And, the business conversation practically ended, Gorman sauntered away in search of the mistress of the house, whose slender, tall young figure had just disappeared in the direction of the palm house in the long conservatory.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"GOOD-NIGHT, Miss Fane," said Celia an hour later, stopping Alison on a bend of the staircase. "I wanted so much a little talk with you!"

The young pianist's dark eyebrows drew together, her heavy, kindly face looked troubled.

"Did you?" exclaimed Alison quickly. "Oh, is it too late now?"

"Yes, my brother is waiting, and his little boy is ill; but another time! Oh, Miss Fane, I will say just this! Mrs. Leigh—I love her so dearly! And you are her friend, her true friend. Now, if ever I can help you—her—will you not come—send for me?"

Alison took and pressed warmly the honest hand held out.

"Yes, thank you! I will not forget it. And, believe me, I am grateful. I know you can be trusted."

"Yes," said the quiet Celia, nodding her head, "I can be trusted! You will find that out. Good-night, my dear."

She nodded her head again in its capacious hood, picked up her train of ugly reddish silk, and went on downstairs to the nearly deserted hall, the only guests remaining being a few gentlemen Jack had invited to a smoke and talk in his snuggerly.

"Thank you so much, Miss Kane," said the ever kind-hearted Jack, as with the most careful courtesy he assisted the young musician into the carriage he had in waiting. Her *douceur* was carefully stowed away to be added to

the fund she was making for the future. "Now are you quite right? Drive on, Peter," and, bowing again with the best manner possible, Jack sent the little pianist of the evening home more than ever loyal and eager in her friendship for the Leighs, glad that she had established even that sort of understanding with their other staunch friend, Alison Fane. "She is true!" thought Celia. "It is an honest face, an honest voice."

And she gave herself up for the moment to the luxury of the drive home in the softly cushioned brougham, reflecting that twenty dollars was a great deal for a most agreeable evening's work, but it was nothing to the Leighs, and would be much toward the nest egg of her future home with Carl Brandeis, her honest, hard-working betrothed of five years' standing!

Alison, meanwhile, after lingering a moment or two just where Celia had bidden her good-night, went slowly up to her own room, feeling as if all the world had taken on a strange and sinister intention. At that moment she would have given much to have never entered the conservatory, never have been forced even for a moment to hear what she had—the tale of Jack's thoughtlessness,—she would not call it more,—in regard to Tasia Mordaunt, coming from Gray Gorman's lips to his young wife's ears. Yet there was this good result: as early as possible she would contrive an hour alone with Agnes and tell her everything, urge, beg, implore of her to lay the whole case before the one best entitled to console, comfort, nay, above all, direct, her—her own husband! And to fight, wrestle, with any other temptation at the one place sure to soothe and lead aright—at His feet, wounded, pierced, weary, on that lonely earthly travel for just such beating hearts, just such faltering steps, as theirs!

"Oh, what a life!" exclaimed Alison almost aloud, as, leaning against the sash of her window, she watched the day break, its colors gather faintly, the eastern sky flushed and delicately alight, and poor Jack's vague "I wonder where" in speaking of his little child came to mind, bringing tears into her eyes. "Oh, little Nell, wherever you are in God's keeping," Alison's thoughts went on, as she watched the pale-hued, vibrant sky leading the new day slowly to its time of "watch and ward," "surely your little lips and eyes can ask the Master who took you to keep the lonely heart aching for you here! That 'Suffer little children, forbid them not, of such is the kingdom of heaven'—surely," thought Alison, "He who taught that can know the needs of the homes that they have left so vacant, can let their little lips and eyes plead——"

A sound, a light rap on the door, roused Alison suddenly, and she turned, remembering that she had not yet removed even the jewels from her neck and arms.

It was Jane, the house-maid, very sleepy, trying not to be cross.

"Oh, you aint been to bed yet, Miss Fane. No more have I, after all this goings on. It's Mr. Broderick, miss, wants to see you right off. Something very particular!"

"Broderick!" exclaimed Alison, a vague alarm possessing her. What could have happened to bring him here at such an hour? "Where—where is he, Jane?" she asked quickly.

"In master's room, miss," said the young English servant. "The 'snuggery,' you know, as he calls it."

Alison, like one in a dream, hurried softly down through the quiet, still house, whose hallway's proportions seemed larger, dimmer, in this solitude with only the faint daylight showing in patches here and there; and as she

opened the door of Jack's "den" and stood there a moment Broderick, turning from the window, uttered a quick exclamation of surprise, his eyes lighting swiftly as he looked at the girl in all the fairness of her youth, with the ball-dress of the evening, the pearls still gleaming on neck and arms, the roses drooping on her breast.

Lovely, bewitching to his senses, as Alison looked to Broderick in that moment, nothing could have operated more strongly in favor of the "rule" he had laid down. How far it seemed to set them asunder!

Her eyes with their softly changing lights were mutely questioning him, and Hugh said quickly, without even offering his hand:

"You see, I have kept my word. I found your friend Miss Benton really ill last night, and so came over for you at once. Can you go right back?"

"Of course! Very ill? Oh, how good of you!" Alison stood still, trying to think, and Broderick continued:

"Don't wait to eat anything; I'll see to that. We must catch a train at Four Corners." He consulted his watch. "You have barely time to take all that"—he smiled, and just touched the laces about her neck—"that finery off. I must say," he added a trifle awkwardly, "you look very pretty in it."

Alison, in spite of her anxiety, smiled and colored with pleasure.

"I was star-gazing and forgot to take it off," she admitted shyly.

"So much the better for me," he answered, as though loath to forego the simple pleasure the sight of her fair young charms gave him. "Stand over there a moment and let me see you for once as you are—not my 'hand,'" he added, smiling, "but Miss Fane."

She smiled half sadly, let fall the draperies in her hand, and held up her head.

"I will not delay," she said with a faint smile. "I—perhaps—well, I can just say good-by to Agnes."

The thought of leaving her friend thus at such a crisis smote her heart, but she would think out what to do; at all events, her duty was clearly now to make all haste back.

Broderick had hired a trap at the junction which he could leave there, so the only delay was in Alison's making ready. She dressed rapidly, scarcely hearing what Jane was saying: regret, hopes the "young lady haint very bad," etc., etc., insisting more than once that she needed no refreshment; then, going downstairs, she hesitated a moment at Agnes' door. Should she awaken her for a good-by? A moment's deliberation showed her this could not be without too long a delay, and instead, with rather nervous fingers, she wrote a line on the back of a card, promising news at once—a loving, grateful good-by.

There was not a moment to be lost. Broderick only hesitated to make sure she was warmly clad, to understand the house-maid would explain matters; then very carefully, and with a confident smile up at her as he did so, he made her comfortable in the little phaeton, sprang in, taking up the reins and sending the pony at a quick pace down the quiet poplar avenue, where the sounds of the awakening day, the click of the mare's heels, the very chill of the clear, crisp day, were pleasant to Alison's senses, part of the comfort of finding herself once more so directly in Broderick's keeping, so completely under his care.

That they exchanged scarcely a dozen sentences counted for nothing. Alison asked anxiously about Hilda. Brod-

erick explained there had been more or less low fever about, but it was strange the cold weather had not killed it.

"If it is—typhoid?" said Alison.

"A bad business, that!" exclaimed Broderick; then, looking down at the girl's face near his shoulder, he added: "It will be a risk for you, child; but—well, what can be done?"

"Sickness never frightens me," declared Alison. "I am only now anxious to reach the poor girl."

He was silent for a moment or two, then said in his quick, decisive way: "We will find out just what Dr. Egerton thinks to-night. Meanwhile try not to feel alarmed."

He left her a moment in the little waiting-room at Four Corners, and came back presently with a steaming bowl of coffee and a roll.

"A change from the Dresden and Sèvres of Braune House," he observed, smiling. "Glove-making has begun again, eh?"

She nodded, wondered what Hugh would say were he to know this frugally served breakfast with him in the crisp, cool morning was more than all the Braune House luxuries. Instinctively she spread out a dainty cambric handkerchief on her knees, and contrived to eat the roll judiciously. Broderick, meanwhile, sauntered up and down the platform. When she had finished and he had taken back the bowl, she discovered her handkerchief gone as well, but he returned holding it in his hands, studying the finely wrought monogram attentively.

"What is the 'M' for?" he inquired, reading the "A. M. F." entwined.

"Morpeth."

"H'm; a very suitable name after Alison."

"My father was proud of the old family name," said the girl, and in the same instant, with a swift remembrance of that father, she wished Broderick had known him. "Oh, how you would have liked him! My poor father!"

Broderick hesitated half a moment. "I want you to tell me various things connected with that time," he said presently. "I have a good reason."

The girl smiled. She thought of Agnes' estimate of the man.

"You need not tell me that," she said, still smiling. "I can't imagine your ever being anything but absolutely reasonable. Fancy your giving way to what we headlong people call impulse."

"I—what!" he stared at her, then put back his head and laughed. "No!" he added; "I won't argue it with you. It's too hopeless. Come, here is our train."

And fifteen minutes later they were emerging onto the platform of Exeford Station, and walking rapidly down the narrow street to the little cottage on Bend Lane, sounds of factory life already reminding Alison at every step that "Cinderella's" holiday was over.

CHAPTER XXX.

JANET'S wrinkled, anxious countenance greeted the travellers from the door, and her tremulous grasp of Alison's hand told of the old woman's anxiety. But she said very little. Broderick enquired when the doctor was expected, and then stood in the little porch while Alison hastened to her friend.

A glance showed her that Hilda was indeed very ill; the girl's great dark eyes lighted joyfully on seeing her, she held out a hot hand, but motioned Alison away when she would have bent down to kiss her.

"No, no, dear; how can we tell? There may be danger," she murmured.

Alison exchanged a few comforting words, thanked her for sending over, then hastened back to ask Hugh whether there was much of the fever about.

"Yes," he admitted; "but it seems only local, not contagious, only do—— Janet, make her careful! Fatigue and want of food induce it, they say. Ah, here is the doctor's gig," he added suddenly, as the little vehicle turned the corner and the welcome face of the Exeford physician came in view. "Now, good-bye for the present." He held out his hand and unconsciously wrung the little fingers Alison placed in it. "I'll be up again to-night," he added. "Meanwhile take good care of yourself. God bless you! No, no, don't thank me!"

And he was gone, pausing a moment to speak to the

doctor on the roadside, evidently explaining his errand of the morning.

"Well, well," exclaimed the doctor, as he tied up his horse and then shook one of Alison's hands in both of his. "Here's a nice ending to your holiday; and my girl Kate never got over there at all! However, I'm glad you had the little change."

He interviewed his patient, then led Alison alone into the little sitting-room of the cottage.

"Are you afraid of sickness?" he said gravely. "No? That is well. Still you must have help. This is a serious case. In fact—has she friends, near relatives?" he added abruptly.

"I—I can find out," said Alison. She thought of the young doctor in Charlier Street. "One very good friend there is, a young physician," she added.

"Then let him know she is ill," said Dr. Egerton quickly. "Tell him it is a pronounced case of typhoid malaria—very weak action of the heart. So far I see nothing organic, but there seems a constitutional delicacy. Now, my dear, remember my caution about yourself. Keep up, but don't live on energy. I'll drop in about two o'clock."

And, lifting his broad-brimmed felt hat, Dr. Egerton walked briskly away, leaving Alison, if cheered, by no means consoled. There was no doubt but that he considered Hilda's case a very serious one, and she determined to let Dr. Holton know of it at once, believing that even by letter he could advise in Hilda's case, since he understood her constitution, knew her story; and besides, there seemed a bond between them, Alison was sure, which would give him the right to know that her life was perhaps in danger.

The morning passed heavily, anxiously. Alison in the intervals of watching, tending on the sick girl, who seemed at times scarcely aware even of her ministrations, and of consoling Janet, who was both frightened and unhappy, watched for the noon hour and Broderick's return. He must have left on the very stroke of the bell, for the usual groups of workers had not appeared before his tall figure came in view of the doorway in which Alison sat, and he approached, holding a letter in his hand.

"I got it for you passing the office," he explained. "It must have just arrived."

It was from Agnes, written evidently directly she had heard of her guest's departure. It was but a line, full of sympathy and regret, ending: "I will see you or write you soon. Meanwhile look to me for any help I can be in any way."

"She is more than good," exclaimed Alison. "We are surely blessed in kind friends." As she handed Broderick the letter she added: "The doctor says his daughter has gone through all this and will call; but I do not mean to let her run any risks, I promise you. Sweet little Kitty!"

"She will be a capital aid," said Broderick quickly. "I'm glad to know she is coming. Well, to-morrow is Sunday. I will look in early, if not to-night." He took her hand again, nodded, and was gone, and Alison once more took up her station at Hilda's side; nor did she leave it again that day or evening except to show herself for an instant to reassure Broderick and Kitty Egerton, who came together; but her white, anxious face alarmed them both. Kitty sent word back by Broderick that she meant to remain all night, and for eight days and nights to come the doctor's brave-hearted little daughter could not be persuaded to leave her post. Having resigned herself to the

fact that Kitty was determined to remain, Alison freely acknowledged her gratitude, and they settled upon a steady *régime* of relieving each other at fixed intervals, a telegram one morning from Dr. Holton promising some cheer in that he would be with them late in the same evening. Broderick came and went with unfailing regularity, not always seeing Alison, but at least giving her the comfort of feeling she could not be long absent from his thoughts. If it was but a word, a look, a touch of his strong hand, it helped her through the dreariest day, and at times Alison almost forgot that from this dreamland there must be an awakening. The brief talks in the little parlor some way brought them very near together, and often after he had bade good-by and gone quite out of sight Alison, who always went over all they had discussed, while alone at Hilda's bedside, would be fairly startled to remember how much of self there had been in these moments of unrestrained conversation, and how she was counting on what the next day would bring forth, the essence of their comradeship being in the fact that topics were never wanting—rather did it seem as though each one brought to mind and light a new one.

They were standing near the fire in the sitting-room. Alison, her slippered foot resting on the fender, gave a little flick to a bit of dust on the skirt she was holding up. Broderick laughed.

"I've been waiting to see if the sick nursing took the *vanity* out of you," he observed, his arm on the high chimney-piece, as he looked down at the graceful girlish figure and uplifted face.

"There!" she exclaimed, the passing sunshine of her look giving way to the anxiety now its almost habitual expression; "I am *glad* of that! *Now* you see that what

you choose to call *vanity* is really only a kind of—well, instinct with me; for *surely* you know a frivolous thought now is impossible.”

“I know it!” He spoke quickly, but sadly. “I—I think of leaving Exeford for a time; I have some business in New York.” He hesitated. “Alison,” he went on hurriedly, but gravely, “do you know, you may think me presumptuous, yet I cannot in some way bear the idea of leaving you just at present even without such watch and ward as I can give you! You have laughed at me for being so prosaic, so commonplace, and now you may well call me merely imaginative, since I cannot in the least tell you what it is I fear.”

He leaned back, looked down eagerly into her face. A sweet, gentle look swept it as she answered in a low voice:

“What shall I—what do you wish me to do?”

He drew a long breath and passed his hand across his brow.

“Yes,” he said, at last, a look of determination in his face; “I will exact one promise. Whether I go or stay, if—if *anyone* comes to you with any tale in which my name is mixed up, will you bring it at once to me? And believe nothing until after you have done so.”

“Against you? Do you mean that?” said Alison proudly. Her look answered him.

“No, no, my friend; not exactly; yet God knows what may be said! And I am working with a purpose, a fixed one. I want money, a great deal of it, and for a good use. It is not debasing to desire it, remember, in the right way. You recollect our talk on the beach? I did not half ‘say my say’ then. Perhaps I never will; that depends——” He broke off.

“The inner core, which even friendship, you said, could not, should not, demand.”

"Did I?" said Broderick slowly, and searching her face with quiet, watchful eyes. "Alison, I am afraid that is a long time ago. There is very little of the inner self. I would not tell you now." He paused, his eyes lighted, held a look half humorous, half provoking. "Come!" he exclaimed; "here is a promise—no, no, I want your hand." He looked down at that small member as he possessed himself of it. "It's rather thin for those rings, isn't it, lately? Well, then, if I run in here to-morrow at church-time, ask me anything in reason, and I will tell you the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth!"

"You promise?" exclaimed Alison, giving his hand a little quick pressure.

"Solemnly, my child."

"Very well, then." She slowly released her too expressive fingers and added: "I shall lie awake to-night deciding what to ask you. No, I won't, either, for I almost know now!" She nodded her head, smiling saucily at him. "Remember, you said the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth!"

"I shall not forget. Good-by, young woman! Where is Janet? Promise me to get all the sleep you can to-night."

"Oh, I shall need it!" retorted Alison, with her frank, sweet laugh. "Remember, I may have to listen to your tale of woe! and I will need physical endurance, no doubt, as well as patience."

He picked up his hat, smiled again, and was gone. Alison lingered a moment with her hands pressed together, thinking deeply, anxiously.

"I know what I will ask him," she reflected. "Will he tell me?"

But she had his promise, and there was small chance of Broderick's being weaker than his word.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HILDA's night was unusually comfortable, and, in spite of the expected interview with Broderick and all it might imply, Alison slept some hours in calm security. The day broke with fitful gusts of wind and rain, setting old Janet to prophesy various calamities which Alison had to laugh off while, breakfast over, she tried to give the little sitting-room as cheerful and home-like an air as possible.

The doctor came and went, pronounced his patient better, prescribed a soothing draught, under the influences of which Hilda dozed in that luxurious fashion,—what other word can be used?—which makes the intervals of rest in a fever curative, and at half-past ten Alison, leaving Janet with their patient, established herself in the little parlor, watching with an almost painful anxiety for Broderick's coming.

Something in their friendship, she was but too well aware, had reached a point wherein there was right on both sides to expect, if need be, demand frankness, and it was this sense of mutual, if as yet unexpressed, understanding which, if it heightened the girl's pulse beats now and then, gave her the feeling of complete repose not only in Broderick's judgments, but his very presence. Whatever lay unrevealed, she asked only to know that which would affect their personal relations. If Broderick's past held any ties which could affect his future, she desired to know them only because she could not in some way dissociate from her mind an idea that by so doing her own

actions in regard to much at present undecided could be determined. Yet, argue with, divert herself as much as possible, she could not shake off a dread lest what he might admit to her would separate her from thoughts such as she sometimes dared indulge in, would mark out with cruel clearness precisely the path she ought to take, not that which she now yearned, with all the sweetness of her young heart and nature, to have him bid her follow.

Life shared with such as Broderick, Alison knew all too well, would be no idle dreamland. It might be that it would be hard in many ways, rigid, fuller of work than luxury, perhaps difficult even to endure after her almost nomadic existence, and yet to create real home ties, however simple, had, long before her cousin's death, been a "dream" with the girl.

Broderick's quick step along the road broke in upon a delicious revery. Alison did not move; as he came in view, smiling and nodding to the figure in the doorway, Alison smiled in answer. Presently she was leading the way for him into the little parlor.

"It looks like home!" said Broderick, with that deep, contented sigh of his.

"I think," said Alison, who had insisted upon his taking their one large easy chair, and was standing for a moment just before him, "I ought to be in the army, for I never can feel contented an hour in a place unless some special lares and penates are set up."

He laughed. "How many sides are there to that funny little nature of yours?" he enquired. "I'm afraid you are fickle-minded. Last night I devoted an hour to calm, deliberate criticism of you."

"Yes?" said Alison saucily.

"Exactly; I was deciding whether you were stable-

mind or the reverse; whether you were not over-enthusiastic, perhaps, at times, and, as a consequence, given to a new extreme when one offered."

"And then?" She had seated herself now at the table, facing him, and was looking at Broderick with her chin in her hands. "This is all very interesting," she continued, "but, remember, not at all the subject in hand."

"Well, it rather bears upon it," said Hugh, with a keen look of amusement. "I must decide how trustworthy a confidante, or, I should say, adviser, I have found."

The girl looked at him gravely. "I won't answer you," she said. "Nor do you expect it. I am tired of thinking!" she added suddenly.

"Can't someone—I, for instance—think for you a little, poor child." He was quickly grave, and only interested in her affairs at once.

"Yes; you can." She looked at him with that tender, appealing glance which had warmed the fibres of his heart once or twice before. "You must," she added hurriedly. "Come, Hugh—Mr. Broderick—I need counsels such as you can give. I have acted too long, I am afraid, on my own authority, and sometimes lately I feel that perhaps I have been arrogant, have thought too much of my own opinion. I will ask you very frankly to help, advise me in many ways when you come home. Tell me now,—what was it to be?—the truth, the whole truth——"

As she broke off he said quickly: "You were to give me headlines. Don't forget your part of it."

She hesitated; her cheeks were pale again as she said:

"I want to know more of your life. Why are you, so far as I can see, simply devoted to work? Have you no—have you never had or desired other ties?"

In the brief silence which fell between them Alison

wondered how she had dared to ask this question; but Broderick's answer came in upon the thought, his grave, quiet tones absorbing all her attention.

"Do you suppose, my friend," he said, with that peculiar smile, at once sad and yet caressing in its sweetness, "any man of even average feeling lives out his five-and-thirty years without some heart experience? No, no. If a man has the ordinary instincts of life, energy, work, within him, he has also the need of some human object for it all; and I—yes, Alison, I know what you would ask. Once I loved—I thought very dearly—a woman who was to have been my wife."

Alison listened, waited. He went on, a look of pain in his dark eyes, yet speaking with perfect composure:

"It is, I suppose, like many another man's and woman's experience. She knew very little of life and the world; she was disappointed that my work came to so little, I am afraid. She persuaded me to try something else. I did; I failed in it. She showed her disappointment in a way I could not fail to see: her preference for another man; and, of course, I resigned all claim at once."

He paused, and Alison said gently: "Were you sure?"

He met her glance again with a peculiar expression in his eyes.

"Oh, yes. I was very sure. The man was—had been my friend; he came to me from her to tell their story. It was, he said, a case of irresistible mutual attraction. Was there anything for me to do but what I did—give her up at once? but in so doing I warned her that he was not a man for any woman to trust. I even begged of him to leave her. I need scarcely say," Broderick continued wearily, "my advice was thrown away. She married him, poor girl!"

"Yes?" Alison's fingers, interlaced on the table before her, moved restlessly. "Were they happy?"

"I never saw them but once—together," said Broderick. "Indeed, I have seldom seen them at all since then, but I have heard from time to time, and it has turned out, so I am told, a sorry business on both sides. He is, I believe, now a professional gambler; you can fancy the life of any woman with such a man. Lately I heard a rumor of his death out West. I am trying now," he added, "to find out if it is true."

Alison hesitated. She said, "Poor creature!" tried to say more, but a queer sense of oppression was upon her very power of speech.

"Now, then," said Broderick, with a quick change of manner; "let us put the past aside. I can scarcely tell you how from that hour until this I have lived without any personal ambitions beyond my work. That has held me, swayed, commanded, owned me. And, let me assure you, there is a wonderful inspiration to me in my life! I would give much," he added suddenly, with a keen, quick glance, "to be master of the mills—to own 'Gorman's'!"

As she moved her lips to speak he went on hurriedly:

"Don't misunderstand me! For I want you above all things to know just what my apparently sweeping statements mean. It is not a mean nor sordid ambition, I am convinced, for except for what it will buy, its being a great factor, a controlling force, I care nothing whatever about money. To be accounted, pointed out, as one of the rich men of the world would only annoy me. I might even,"—he smiled upon her eager face, lighted by intense interest in every word he was saying,—“fall very far short of your ideal of what I would do with money were I a capitalist. There would be precious few mere

luxuries—for myself, at least; but the money resulting from man's co-operative toil used well and justly—there is something ennobling in such a possession! It is the opposite, the answer, to idleness, to beggary. Well used it is as divine in its mission as ever patient suffering and the privations of poverty.”

“As you said of power.”

“Precisely; as wiser men have said of it. All these things are the grand sciences, the aids to really Christian life, when read aright. Factory life inspires me far beyond the mere hum and throb of the machines; yet I hear in them the music of the sages, the very pulse beats of a nation. Now, then,” he said, breaking off, and, moving nearer to where she was seated, he looked down into her earnest eyes; “are you satisfied with having drawn out some of the thoughts I fancied I could never even put into words?”

“Yes, and I thank you,” she said gravely.

“And I you, my friend,” he answered quickly. “I need a vent terribly, at times, and you little know, you cannot understand, how hopelessly uninteresting,—I don't know what else to call it, what other word to use,—my life is outside the mill! I go back to my cheerless room, I walk out, I take a book to read: the humanity is not in it, some way, there is a never-ending lack, a want, and I am better, brighter, for even this short hour with you.”

“In your life at the mills,” said Alison quickly, “you must come in contact with many who suffer, need help; what then?”

“Ah!” exclaimed Broderick, drawing his brows together. “That brings me to a subject I am glad to discuss with you. There is, there has been for some time, an element of,—what shall I say?—dissatisfaction at the mills.

In some cases the workers are in the right, and I have stood by them. In others they are merely trying to make confusion, create excitement, a general Babel in which their noisy tongues shall be loudest. It is, you will find, nine times out of ten the origin of our worst strikes, this love of self-glorification, excitement, confusion, paltry recognition of some demagogue as a great orator and born leader according to his own idea. You see, they have never really read history, but they intend to create it on their own plan."

"And do you fear this sort of trouble we—I have often read of?" Alison enquired anxiously. Her ideas of a "strike" were decidedly sanguinary, blood-curdling in the pictures they presented of gagged "tyrants," burning buildings, shouting mobs.

"I am watching everything just now," Broderick answered. Then, seeing her look of alarm he gave a low laugh and said gently: "Don't be afraid, my dear child! You will have time to put on your hat in peace, even, perhaps, to see that all those,—don't you call them bangs?"—glancing at the vagrant soft brown locks on her brow,— "curls, are they?—are in proper order, and then to walk calmly and sedately downstairs. Oh, no! it will be, if at all, a very disagreeable but matter of fact sort of affair, in which no wages and idle men in every doorway will be the only exciting features."

"And can't you stop it?" exclaimed Alison.

"Yes; on terms,"—his face had the same quick, set look of determination she remembered in the talk with Mrs. Broderick when he was urging the juster claims of the workingman upon her,— "on terms I'd fling back to them before I would accept."

"What, for instance?"

"The refusal to allow any new invention, for one thing, to take the place of an old method to make the goods cheaper, but the market better. That is one thing. The guarding of certain secrets of the craft another. What can be openly patented I say every patentee has the right to control; what cannot, is only a way of working, should be taught as freely as the alphabet and multiplication table to anyone who cares to, who can, learn."

A gust of wind and rain together sent the branches of an old tree swaying against the window, and the little room darkened. Hugh glanced suddenly at the clock.

"I have taken all your morning!" he exclaimed. He looked toward the stairs. "I suppose she is asleep?" he asked.

"Yes. Will you—can you not dine with me?"

"How I should like to! Would you prepare the dinner?" He laughed. "Some day I will accept the invitation I must refuse this morning. I promised to let your friend Miss Kate hear how you were." He hesitated. "A walk in the woods would do you good, if the sun will only shine."

"Never mind. I feel better, spurred in some way."

He laughed lightly, picked up his hat, said, "Remember, if I don't see you, let me hear from you in the morning," and the next moment Alison was alone.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HILDA, though decidedly improved, was still in a critical condition, and the day drifted along, showery, uncertain in its outer aspect, indoors full enough of care and anxious watching to fill every moment, and yet, as such days do, it lagged. Alison went to sleep late, and was awakened by another storm like that of yesterday, windy, darkening the atmosphere, raw and chill.

She had just finished her coffee, stirred the parlor fire into a more genial blaze, glad that the invalid slept, and was wondering how things were going at Braune House, when a boy she had seen often in a neighboring street appeared, twisting a piece of paper in his very grimy little hand.

"It be's for you; aint you Miss Fane?" said the youth with the careless freedom of manner common to the "small boy" of Exeford in general. "The lady's give it to me is waitin' in the depot."

He eyed Alison critically while, with a sudden sense of new trouble, she read the few words Agnes Leigh had written on the paper:

"I must see you. I am at depot. Don't delay; come at once. I paid boy.

"AGNES."

Delay! It only seemed as though she could not quickly enough make herself ready to hasten to her friend, to explain to Janet that "she had to go out for a short time,"

and in less than ten minutes she was on her way, around the short cut, across the junction tracks, and to the upper entrance of the long line of buildings, including freight-, waiting-, and baggage-rooms, for this important station. Whatever the cause, Alison thanked God that Agnes had been led to send for her! Surely the extremity must have been very great, the step was so unusual.

She saw her directly she entered the door of the ladies' waiting-room. Agnes from her station in the window turned a face deathly white, with eyes that fairly burned as with unshed tears, and the next moment, with a little half-hysterical sob, she said:

"Alison, dear, it is just for a moment. I am going away. I wanted to see you!"

She held Alison's hands tightly in both of hers.

"Going away! What do you mean?" said Alison. "Sit down, dear. No? Can you come back to the cottage with me?"

"Yes—no—I cannot say. I have left my home, Alison, left Jack—everything." She looked steadily at her friend. "I wrote a line for him—after what happened yesterday—and told him I was going. I did not say where, but I know he will suspect, and Gray Gorman will be waiting for me."

"Agnes!" Alison spoke the name, and then could say no more. She understood it now. Roused by Jack's neglect,—it could be no more,—the poor worn-out, excited girl had come away, lured by some specious argument of Gorman's; she knew the main one he could use: her voice, a public life, triumph, excitement, success!

"Agnes," said Alison, speaking rapidly, but with all the energy, decision, of which she was capable, "there is no time for words and foolish arguments here. Besides, poor

dear, you look really ill. You must do as I say. Come back with me to our little place, take breakfast, then we can talk more calmly over what is best to be done. No, dear, we must not waste another moment."

Agnes scarcely hesitated now. She put one of her trembling little hands on her friend's arm, and allowed herself to be led slowly, tenderly, by Alison down the rough side road she chose, to avoid observation of the more crowded thoroughfares, and as quickly as it could be accomplished made her way up to Bend Lane.

The little cottage near the turn in the river never had appealed so strongly to Alison as it did just at that moment. Something there was about it which gave a feeling of rest, security, an honest welcome, to the poor traveller, which was far better, and infinitely more soothing, than the lonely splendors of the great house she had left, and had once so joyously, proudly, called home!

"Now, dear," said Alison a trifle anxiously, as she led the way into the cheerful parlor, "you must rest a few moments."

Agnes apathetically allowed her hostess to remove her wraps and make her comfortable in the deep easy chair, where she leaned back, her poor little face showing white against its dark cushions, her lovely eyes feverish, yet so sunken, something infinitely touching and appealing about the change of look, color, manner, from the proud, superb-looking girl Alison remembered like a lovely picture coming down the staircase in the green velvet and flashing jewels that night not yet a month ago. But she scarcely spoke until she had forced Agnes to drink some coffee and eat part of a round of toast; then she left her for a moment, coming back with her hat and outdoor garments still on.

"You won't mind my going out for just a little while, dear," she said gently. "I will be back very soon; then we must have a long, frank talk. Janet is delighted to have you to look after."

She bent down, kissing Agnes' soft cheek tenderly, feeling it was wet with tears; then, conscious she had something to do which would require all of her courage, determination, and, it might even be, skill, Alison bent her steps rapidly first in the direction of the telegraph office, where she sent by the most rapid method the following despatch:

"To Mr. John Leigh, Braune House, Exetown:

"Agnes with me. Not well.

"From ALISON FANE,

"BEND LANE, EXEFORD."

and, this accomplished, with a mute prayer that her mission might not fail, Alison turned her steps toward the mill. It was an hour when she would be likely to find Gray Gorman in his office alone.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MR. GRAY GORMAN had just concluded his morning mail, which he had read with some satisfaction, in that it betokened prosperity and an increase of success in various business undertakings; but that he was anxious, nervous about some other personal matters was clearly evident, and when Alison's knock sounded on the door he said: "Oh, *come in*," in a snappish voice, wheeled himself around upon his office chair, and prepared himself to be very "short" with anyone who had dared intrude upon his seclusion when the card with "Busy" in big letters hung in a prominent place on the outer door.

He started as Alison entered. Just what he expected Mr. Gorman could not have told, and Alison's first words puzzled him still more.

"I must see you alone," she said quietly; "and on business chiefly your own. It is of every importance, Mr. Gorman."

He changed color but said quickly:

"Well, we are alone, aint we? Why—you might as well sit down."

Alison was standing in the window just overlooking the courtyard. She hesitated, then said quietly:

"No. I have only a few words, I hope, to say. I prefer to stand. Mr. Gorman, Agnes Leigh is at my house."

A queer look crept up the young man's face, resting unpleasantly in his eyes.

"What's that for?" he asked shortly. "Why didn't she——"

"She sent for *me*," said Alison quickly, the color burning in her cheeks, contempt for the man sweeping even prudence aside; "I met her at the depot. Mr. Gorman, you must not, shall not see her!"

He turned, looking at the slender young figure, the highbred, quiet face of his "hand" at first in a blind rage, then he laughed a low, insolent, angry laugh.

"I shan't, eh! Well, I rather think, young lady, it's time someone brought you down a peg or two. When a lady writes to a gentleman making an appointment to meet him—on business—I rather think you can't keep him from keeping it! Oh, no! You may be very smart, or think yourself so, and you've got well set up, I don't doubt, by a little notice and your being the old woman's granddaughter, but all that won't work worth a cent here, let me tell you! I've Agnes' written words, mind you, and—" he hesitated a moment, and added with the same laugh—"if she's fooled me, I don't care who knows it!"

For an instant Alison felt herself fairly sick with the horror, the vague dread the man's words, his threats, gave her! Oh, what had, could have, induced Agnes to stoop to such folly, such weakness, as to write one word to this man! She had not the least doubt the letter contained nothing beyond, or worse than, the fact that she was leaving home, presumably for a public career; but in the hands of such a man, what a weapon even a written line, baldly stating the fact, could be! Was there no chivalry, no manliness, in the man before her, thought Alison, to which she could appeal?

"And you—you have advised her to this," said Alison in a low, but clear, vibrant voice, her whole look and bearing showing her contempt for the man before her. "Would you steal a man's money as easily as you do him

this harm? And which, Mr. Gray Gorman, is the deadlier theft! As for Agnes, do not flatter yourself for an instant that she has the least idea of consulting you except in regard to an idea she has had for public singing, which now, anyway, she is too ill to carry out. Show me her letter; I must, I will see it!"

He laughed; coolly surveying her from head to foot as he leaned back against the edge of his desk, insolently, tormentingly, composed.

"Take care, young lady," he said softly. "You can't defend your poor friend." He folded his arms. "I've an old score of long standing," he went on, "to settle up with two or three of them, and I rather think"—he touched his breast pocket softly—"the means of doing it is just there. See?" He paused while Alison, breathless from dismay as well as scorn of the whole proceeding, looked at him without speaking. "Ladies who quarrel with their husbands and don't find things just to their liking ought to be very careful how they put any of their feelings on paper! H'm! I rather think what I have here will wipe the slate clean out of old scores and begin a new account to my credit, on my side!"

"You refuse to give it to me!" cried Alison with blazing cheeks, feeling that were she a man, to have struck his insolent, smiling face with her open hand would have been infinite satisfaction, to humble him to the dust an imperative duty now. "Then let me see, Mr. Gorman, what you think of my side of the case, my weapon; for I have one which may surprise you! I came here to Exe-ford, when my grandmother died, merely to see how things were going, *for every bit of this factory*,"—she laid her hand on the table near her without moving her eyes from his face—"every stick and stone, all that it means and



GRAY GORMAN CHECK-MATED.

brings, is *mine*, under the *last* will made by my grandmother, Rachel Broderick! You are surprised! Well, you may be. A line, a telegram from me to a trusty friend in New York would bring every proof here within twenty-four hours, and I would call you and your partners to a very close accounting, I assure you!"

The man's face was rigid! Not for an instant did he doubt the truth of Alison's statement. It fitted in to what had been the missing parts of a puzzle. But with his shrewdness of brain, his kind of quick-wittedness he saw that delay was dangerous. Before she left he must make some kind of terms with her. A queer, sick feeling made him lean heavily against the desk even while he watched her without a muscle moving, his thoughts taking on lightning rapidity and calculation.

"So that's what you've been up to, is it?" he said with white lips, trembling with suppressed rage; "came here to spy, did you? What if we fight you?"

Alison's lip curled scornfully. "Try it! My case is too clear for any lawyer with brains to touch one against me! Oh, no, Mr. Gorman. I promised my grandmother in her dying hours to come here, and see 'Gorman's' for myself! Well, I have done it!"

His head dropped, he bit his under lip, still raging inwardly, yet certain this girl, whom he had tried so hard to keep in her place, held the winning card.

"Well," he said at last, looking up sullenly, "what are you going to do about it?"

"Just this," said Alison quickly, and moving a little nearer, "I will let things rest as they are, anyway, for the present, nor disturb them without warning, in exchange for that letter and your promise to go not a step further

in this—mean business; in fact, to keep yourself entirely out of Mrs. Leigh's way for the future."

"And if I—don't see it?" he asked with his mean smile.

"I shall put the matter in my lawyer's hands before night," declared Alison.

A moment—two—three—passed in silence, then Gorman, looking in his sidewise fashion at Alison, said slowly:

"I want that in writing."

"Not a word of it!" exclaimed the girl. "The idea! Not a creditable paper for *you* to have on hand! Well, take care *I* do not withdraw my terms!"

He hesitated, bit his lip, then drew from his pocket Agnes' poor foolish little note, handing it, with a vindictive look, to his visitor.

It was, as she had supposed, very brief, in fact, curt. It had neither beginning nor special ending:

"I will be in Exeford at 10 A. M. Meet me at the corner of Dubois and Field roads at 10:30.

"AGNES."

"I suppose," said Alison gravely, as she refolded the paper and put it in her purse, "you were at the place?"

He laughed. "Yes, confound it!"

"And you have nothing more?"

He shook his head, kicking the surbase near him with the toe of his well-polished boot. What right had this girl to look at him, speak to him like that? and he'd see himself further before he let her make a complete fool of him and know how Agnes' action had incensed and mortified him!

"And what about Jack, eh?" he enquired at last, with a smile.

"He will be here on the next train," said Alison, who, now that her point was carried, was weak and trembling from the effort, the anxiety, the fear, it had entailed.

He changed color again, but Alison said carelessly:

"It certainly is not part of my plan to mention this morning's work! So far you are safe; and, Mr. Gorman, remember: one step in a wrong direction and I will have my message on the wires in an hour."

She made no motion or word of formal good-by, passed out of the room and down the stairs, sick and weak with the worry, the struggle of the interview, but oh, how devoutly thankful that from even any imprudence, any hint of wrong-doing, poor Agnes was free! Physically and mentally exhausted she reached home, where before even speaking to Agnes she went into her own room and kneeling at her bedside, girl-like, relieved her feelings by a burst of weeping; hot passionate tears—perhaps more for herself, her own heart needs, her growing sense of loneliness, than even from nervous exhaustion or sympathy with her friend, whose courtesy, gentle hospitality, had so warmed her heart.

And at the same hour over in Exetown the master of Braune House alone in his study was pacing the floor, restlessly, moodily, angrily. He was, he told himself, disgraced, cheated for life! An hour ago Agnes' farewell letter had been handed him by the would-be sympathetic Mrs. Macneil.

"I heard all your talk with Mrs. M. in the conservatory," wrote Agnes, "that night, and I know where you prefer to spend your time. I have already arranged to meet a friend in Exeford who is kindly interested in my

future. I need say no more. Final matters had best be attended to by lawyers, without our meeting."

Wretched, angered, maddened as he felt, Jack knew that he had allowed the sweetness of that honeymoon in which the flower house was built to die away embittered by his own carelessness, neglect, urged on by the flatteries, the soft speeches of another woman. To make an hour or two, which would have hung heavy on his hands, pass lightly he had let poor Agnes, his childless young wife, with all her keen, high spirits, her passionate, enthusiastic nature, brood and grieve in silence over her wrongs until she had believed them only to be avenged, *not* righted! What had come to her, thought Jack, that she should have taken such a step! How was he ever to hold up his head again! Why, even Tasia—— And then with a queer laugh Jack remembered what her last words an hour or so before had been: "*You're actually as dull as a man in love with his wife!*" Was he? Jack stood still, shrugged his shoulders, then turned suddenly to see the face and figure of Mrs. Macneil in the doorway.

"Is there—can I do anything for you, Mr. John?" the housekeeper said sympathetically. As he looked—I had almost said glared—at her, Mrs. Macneil continued: "I'm so heart sorry, sir! But I've seen it for a long time a-coming, and I'd oughter hev warned you, sir, but you were so blind, sir! She was young and always giddy——"

"She—of whom are you talking?" almost thundered Jack. "If you mean your mistress, Mrs. Leigh, as I can't pretend not to see you do, I beg you will make no further allusions of the kind—to me or to anyone. Do you perfectly understand me, Mrs. Macneil, or must I make my meaning clearer? To anyone—here or anywhere. Now

you can leave me, if you please. When I wish to see you again I will send you word or ring."

The woman, too angry even to try to speak, was moving sullenly away when the housemaid, Jane, came hurrying along, having one of the ominous yellow envelopes and books in her hand.

"Just here, sir," she said, politely indicating the place for Jack to sign. He did it mechanically, and, with fingers whose nervousness he could not conceal, tore the envelope open. He read it once, twice, then lifting a very white, dull-looking face, said, addressing Jane:

"Get your mistress' rooms ready, aired, whatever should be done. She is with Miss Fane, quite ill! She must have been ill when she started!"

And as the women hurriedly withdrew Jack paced the floor once or twice, his face drawn and set.

"And God help me! But for Alison, perhaps—— No, no, I will see her! This is no time for doubt, or anything but getting the poor child directly home. My God! what shall I perhaps have to hear?"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

“AND that is all, Alison, dear.”

Agnes, still weak and feverish, was the speaker, as, leaning back in the great easy chair, she finished her brief recital. “You see, day after day he seemed to care only for getting away from home to spend his time *there*—with her. I can’t tell you how or what I felt; then, when I felt I should stifle if I didn’t get away, I wrote to Gray Gorman—I merely meant to use him as a means for my getting to New York and trying what could be done with my voice. I knew I could earn my way at least, and Jack surely no longer needed me; the caring was over long ago. Mrs. Macneil would make him comfortable in my absence. I had lost my influence, he was scarcely ever with me, nothing seemed to interest him at home, and he could lose nothing by my absence! Some way, during those last days, my very presence seemed an irritation! Oh, how often I wished we were poor, struggling! That I had a little home to make bright for him after a hard day’s work!” her sweet eyes filled, her lips quivered. “Alison, many and many a time I’ve envied the poorest woman working all day, taking one of her children in her arms and going out at six o’clock to meet her husband! I used often to see one such! Last summer, when I often walked out alone late in the afternoon while Jack was busy somewhere, I got acquainted with her very easily, and she told me all the story; how they married too young, perhaps, but her ‘man,’ as she called him, would not leave

home in England without her; and they'd worked hard, had their ups and downs, sickness, poverty, death, even, but 'he' had been so true and she'd always kept her place tidy, and they were saving a bit now. O Alison, how it made my heart hungry! Once or twice from a little distance I watched them meet! It was a picture! He would toss the baby up, then they'd trudge along home, the child in his arms! Sometimes I felt as if I could cry aloud to the very heavens above me when I would go home, to that great, beautiful house, and feel myself miles, *leagues* away from the man I loved, and who had taken me for better or for worse! Do you know, I have come almost to wish some sudden, strange wheel of fortune would make us poor, force Jack to hard work, to looking for every home comfort to me, to these hands of mine he cares for now only because they are white and soft, and shining with jewels."

She held them out appealingly. Her tears were flowing now unchecked, and with a little sob infinitely miserable and hopeless, she turned, and leaning her arms on the chair bent her head down, bursting into tears.

Alison's heart was beating with swift, anxious strokes as for an instant she hesitated; then, putting her hand on the bowed head, she knelt down, saying in a low, quick voice:

"Agnes, you little know how near that wish comes to the truth; for all that Jack owns is in danger this very moment! To-day, to-morrow, any moment may see him a ruined man! Would you have trouble like this fall upon him alone—with you away—believing you had wilfully at such a time deserted him!"

Agnes sprang to her feet. She pressed Alison's arm with her hand eagerly.

"*Alison!*" she whispered, "what *do* you mean! How can that be!"

"I am telling you the truth," said Alison, half frightened at what she had said and done. "There is trouble in the air. It may come to nothing, but it may be terribly serious."

"You are sure?"

"Perfectly."

"And does—my husband know it?"

"He may very soon. O Agnes! Dear friend! Do not hesitate! Go—go back of yourself! Tell him, if need be, all the struggle, the misery, the temptation, how you love him! Surely this is the moment for free speech between you, perfect understanding. Do not lose it!"

"Wait; let me think," said Agnes. She pressed the palms of her hot little hands closely together. Then suddenly she raised her eyes.

"Alison," she half whispered, "will you come with me? Will you take me home?"

"My dearest,"—Alison's eyes were streaming now, and she put her arms closely about the swaying, slender young figure—"I would take you ten times the distance too thankfully; but now that you have made the decision for yourself, let me tell you—wait half an hour, for I think, I am almost sure, that length of time will bring Jack Leigh himself over here."

But Agnes' feverish strength had spent itself, and Kate Egerton appeared ten minutes later to find young Mrs. Leigh in a dead faint on Alison's lounge, Alison and old Janet both occupied anxiously in bringing back some life to the cold limbs, the white, still face, from which every vestige of consciousness had faded.

"What on earth brought her here, weak as all that?" whispered Kate.

"Business," said Alison. "But Jack will be over on this train."

And as Kitty passed out on her way to the druggist, she met the young master of Braune House striding along from the depot as though quite prepared for the sight which greeted him on reaching Alison's little doorway.

CHAPTER XXXV.

JACK'S face was scarcely less white than his young wife's as, hardly hearing what was said, he bent over her, lifted one little lifeless hand in his, then, looking eagerly at Alison, said in a husky voice:

"When—how was it—what brought her here?"

And as Kitty with her ready tact had withdrawn a little, Alison whispered:

"The fever must have been already working on her. She was terribly excited and ill when she came. She waited at the station and sent for me."

"*Thank God!*"

Alison well knew what it meant.

"I sent for you directly I got her here. She—she fancied you would be happier *without* her."

Jack gave Alison a searching look, turned away, then as she was still chafing the cold hands, he bent down, kneeling beside her and taking one of Agnes' hands quickly in his own.

"Is the doctor coming?" he asked. "God bless you, Alison! There may be better days ahead. Agnes," he murmured, bending over her and touching her closed eyes with his lips, "my sweetheart, look at me."

Slowly, very strangely, with a long, fluttering sigh, the girl's white eyelids lifted, the dark eyes gazed straight into his.

"My little girl—my little Nell," she murmured faintly, "where have they put her?"

In that strange dreamland it almost seemed as if the child must have spoken; and as Jack bent over his wife, kissing her tenderly, whispering words of gentlest endearment, Alison, motioning to Kate to follow, slipped out of the room. In the hall Kitty whispered anxiously: "It will be all right now? He will take her home himself. We must not forget poor Hilda."

"No, no. There is your father!" said Alison with deep relief as the doctor's familiar figure drew near. "Oh, I am so glad. I can never tell you half *how* glad I am that Jack is here, that it is all right. Kitty, dear, go up to Hilda. I must not leave Jack to excite or worry Agnes."

And welcoming the doctor with a smile, Alison led the way into the little parlor, where Jack was sitting at his wife's side, his arm about her waist, her head upon his shoulder.

A brief, anxious consultation ensued, which resulted in Jack's going off to procure the easiest possible conveyance in which to take Agnes gently as a tired child back to Braune House. Whether an illness were impending or not, the good doctor found it hard to say, but he felt quite sure the journey in that way could be performed in safety, in any case she would be better off at home, and to have seen Jack's eagerness in all details, his anxiety to know just what had best and could be done for Agnes' comfort, safety, well-being in every way, no one would have dreamed that twenty-four hours ago he had seen her slowly mount the stairs to her own room without even so much as a formal "good-night," and Agnes clung to, watched his every movement, holding his hand from time to time, as though dreading to lose the magic of his touch. That she was very ill, all knew. Alison feared the worst, yet as she saw her lifted in her husband's arms into the carriage,

as she watched them drive slowly away, and turned back to the little cottage and her other charge, there was only room in her heart for deepest thanksgiving. Come what would, Agnes had won the day, and no stain of wrongdoing was in the new life which it might be God's tender will to let her begin, once more her husband's companion and cherished wife.

But all of this had involved Alison in perplexities of a deeper character; for how was this affair with Gorman to end? She was very well aware matters would soon reach a crisis, in which a decision, one which might change the tenor of all their lives, would be imperative. To appeal to Broderick would have been her first thought, but for her unwritten bond with Gray Gorman, and she almost wished he would take some step, in regard to mill matters, which would release her from her promise. Small chance of that, however, just now, and if Broderick were to go away on business, as he had said was possible, she would feel herself even more at sea! Would Agnes and her husband ever guess at what a price she had bought back that scrap of paper, and bound young Gorman over to silence and inaction? There had been just time to let Agnes know what had taken place, to let her see the letter destroyed, burned before their eyes, as, Alison said, "all recollection of it and its cause must be in their memories." But Alison felt now the weight of her agreement cruelly oppressive. I am inclined to think her anxiety to talk it all over with Broderick, and the ban of silence imposed, was the most galling part of the yoke, which made her smile, and the color dye her cheeks, since was not that in itself a glaring proof of her own growing dependence on this very independent young "master workman" of Gorman's, as she had heard Broderick called by some of his

fellow-craftsmen? Well, there was certainly something brooding. Alison roused herself to see to Hilda Benton, with a feeling she could not shake off, that what had just taken place was really but the "beginning of the end." The past might have held its perplexities, needs for anxious, careful decision, its all too brief hours of delicious happiness, companionship, moving of heart to heart, soul to soul, but the future she felt very sure would be the real battlefield.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ONE clear, cold morning soon after the events chronicled in the last chapter, a trim-built young man wearing eye-glasses and carrying a neat-looking "grip" stepped off the New York train at Exeford, and was almost at once accosted by a gentleman of middle age and very genial countenance, who lifted his broad-brimmed hat, said: "Dr. Holton, I believe; well, I'm Egerton," and the *confrères* in the healing science, each known to the other by reputation, shook hands warmly as members of that mystic fraternity are wont to do when cases are peculiarly interesting.

"Bad business this fever, eh, doctor?" said the younger man. "Let me see: I'm to take a train, I believe, for Exetown, near by."

"Not for an hour," said the other briskly; "and Dr. Forbes and I would be pleased to consult with you, if it's not too informal. I read your paper on the germs last month."

"And I heard you address the — Society three years ago," smiled the young doctor. "So you see I have to acknowledge my indebtedness."

"Well, well! we're not so out of the world, after all! I was talking to an Albany man the other day—— However, I mustn't forget the business in hand. You'll find Forbes keen, smart as a whip; he is determined to slay the dragon this year, for never was a grander, finer climate than ours! There cannot be any reasons for disease

spreading unless in the condition of some of the dwellings."

A brisk-looking little conveyance was in waiting, and as the doctor assisted his guest into it, he went on to say:

"The wife of one of our prominent men is ill here with this 'touch and go' fever—she is a great friend, by the way, of Miss Fane, and I fear contracted the fever through a rather rash visit over to our town one wet morning; system all ready for it, run down, overwrought, every nerve quivering."

It certainly had not been part of Holton's programme to spend an unnecessary moment in Exeford on the journey to Hilda Benton's sick bed, but, as matters stood, he could only interest himself in the case in hand, appealing to him peculiarly now that he had learned its origin.

Braune House looked a very different place on this occasion from the last time its gates were opened to admit any friend from Exeford, but there was at all seasons a grandeur about the fine old avenue, the stately imposing mansion, and as a matter of course the Exeford doctor mentioned its historic claims to his companion, who was duly impressed, and like most of strangers visiting the scene, his first thought was what an ideal home,—a feeling encouraged by the first glimpse of the great firelit hall, with its background of tropical color, warmth, and bloom, but the stillness over everything told an anxious story. Very quietly did the three doctors hold their consultation and make their visit to the luxurious chamber where lay the beautiful wife of the master of the house, who could not conceal his impatience while the great men held their secret conclave, but paced the floor of the hall, wondering why it took them so long to formulate their bad news. For he feared only the worst; yet, the New

York doctor had in his hearing said decidedly: "Her anxiety to get well is greatly in her favor!"

So she wanted to live! Poor Agnes! Well, God willing, Jack told himself, there should be something to live for.

"Try change of air as soon as you can," said Dr. Holton finally to his host. "Even at this season of the year you will find it may be the best thing for her, especially as she seems so anxious for it herself. Nine times out of ten what is a distinct craving on the part of the patient is nature's wisest remedy." And he detailed one or two striking instances of his theory, while Leigh listened, pondered, finally said, turning to Dr. Egerton, who had just reappeared: "Doctor, how would Pendarley do for my wife? You know the place: fine, high air, not too much exposed."

"Excellent; and such an easy journey, could be made in a carriage in three hours, I should think. Come now, doctor," he added to the young New Yorker, "we must not miss our train."

And, scarcely touching the refreshments offered, Dr. Egerton bore his colleague away, assuring him, quite unnecessarily, that he was taking him to a case even more interesting than the one they were leaving.

"But that young friend of yours who sent word—Miss Fane—is a trump! My Kate very seldom makes a mistake, and she just swears by her! Wonderful good breeding about the girl, and something, I can't just say what, but it puzzles me! She looks born and bred, best of all by nature, fitted to high places. Well, well, a doctor's 'magic lantern' shows up many a queer slide!"

A sentiment the young New Yorker echoed most emphatically.

Exeford, with its many tall smoke stacks, irregularities of architecture, hum, and bustle, made the young doctor's pulses quicken as they drew near it, and once on the platform he could hardly accommodate himself to the doctor's somewhat leisurely pace, but the short cut was taken, and ten minutes later Dr. Holton was shaking hands with Alison, his professional instinct detecting a change not altogether for the better in the girl's looks, then following her up the little staircase met gratitude—was there not something more?—in the glance poor Hilda turned upon him.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"I DECLARE," remarked Miss Egerton, as she watched Alison measuring some tea in a small spoon from her caddy; "we can preach woman's rights and her wrongs as loudly as we like—but, my dear, how we do like a man's opinion now and then, don't we?"

Alison laughed lightly. "Go on," she said, looking up merrily. "That is the beginning, I am very sure, of something most important."

"Well, I was just thinking," said Kate, "that there is Hilda Benton 'picking up', after Dr. Holton said she would, and Agnes writing over to know how soon Hilda can join her at Pendarley! Now if those wise men of ours had said stay at home, *sig. 500 grs.*, what then?"

"Despair!" said Alison, "and decided disappointment to the nursing sisterhood, for I am quite as eager for the trip as ever Hilda or Agnes."

"And a jolly good thing, too," said the doctor's daughter, with a shrewd look at Alison. "No more fever cases just yet, if you please, for me! Oh, you'll pick up wonderfully at Pendarley! I'm so glad the guide-books and towns-people and all that sort have forgotten it; just as it is, it is picturesque and primitive and enchanting. You'll find no end of old things, my dear, to rave over, from people to high back chairs and ugly plates. Old Miss Homer lives there—one of the clan! She was born some hundred or two years ago and lives in the funniest little four-room cottage, and, of course, makes gloves."

"See here, why not take board with Miss Homer! I shouldn't wonder if the old lady would jump at it, and with her you could do as you liked."

"Shall I suggest it to Agnes Leigh?"

"Do! I wonder they never thought of it! Oh, here come our doctors." Kitty, with her frankest air, was saying: "How do you do, Dr. Holton? Daddy, you never looked in the glass when you tied that cravat!"

"Miss Fane," said Dr. Egerton, compelled to submit himself and his cravat to his daughter's quick little fingers, "why don't you send this damsel about her business if she is bothering you?"

"But she isn't," said Alison. "On the contrary, she's a fund of most useful and entertaining information!"

"Yes, daddy dear," said Kate, drawing back to survey her work, "I've been cracking up Pendarley as just the place to take Miss Benton. Dr. Holton, I leave it to you. Wouldn't the change do her great good?"

"You knew!" said her father; but seeing a perfectly blank look on Kate's face, really genuine, he added: "Holton has a letter here from Jack Leigh urging that you and your friend shall go down to a cottage there with his wife. It is an old friend's, Miss Homer's. So like Jack and Agnes to do someone a good turn while they're at it."

Kate clapped her hands with delight. "There now, daddy! Hold your dear old head up and look proud of your daughter. That's just what I've been advising!"

And a very brief consultation over a letter from Braune House brought the matter to a decision. Leigh wrote they could have Miss Homer's cottage "right in Pendarley woods," and room at the little inn, and all Agnes needed was to be sure of their company.

"Of course, now," said Dr. Egerton, "all care in regard to moving Miss Hilda will be at an end. The Leighs always make everything royally comfortable in travelling."

Alison smiled, said "certainly," decided to accept the plan, which would no doubt ensure personal comfort all around and really entail no obligation she could not repay. The doctors reported Hilda as decidedly better; her worst symptom, the weakness, could best be met by the change of air prescribed.

"My mission seems about over," said Dr. Holton, who lingered after the older physician and his daughter had left, and stood alone for a few moments with Alison in the little parlor; "and I have a few patients who may really be needing me in New York," and as he took his leave he added: "But I will not fail to see you and Hilda in the morning."

Alison, left alone, stood still a moment in the cottage window, deep in thought. Not far away to the left rose the gaunt chimneys of "Gorman's."

"All sides seem to need, to demand, just what I really could do," she murmured half aloud; "and yet, for that one reason only, cannot give!"

How cruel, tantalizing, baffling fate seemed! And was her promise worth so much? Well, she had given it, scorning the written bond. She had pledged her word until, or rather unless some great emergency arose, to remain for a time passively silent.

Pendarley, as Kate Egerton had said, seemed to have been overlooked or forgotten when that region of the country was suddenly discovered by tourists and invalids to be so beautiful, life-giving, and remote from the toil and bustle of the madding crowd. For it was, and is,

the quaintest of little villages, nestling among the eternal hills, yet on a high ground swept by a breeze laden with the odors of pine and balsam. One straggling main street with very unobtrusive off-shoots comprised its business portion; two or three villas belonging to New York or Albany families who summered here, a few stores, and a tavern or small hotel, whose trade at this season consisted chiefly in transient custom, made up the rest of the village proper, so that, when on a certain clear, crisp, but not very cold day our travellers drove up to the hotel doorway, Mrs. Fenn, the landlord's wife, had plenty of time to wait on them in the best manner possible, especially as, after inspecting the diminutive proportions of Miss Homer's cottage close by, it had been decided that, while Alison and her charge took up their abode with the old lady, Agnes and her nurse, without whose care she could not be for a time yet, should occupy Mrs. Fenn's best rooms, which were well aired, with fires lighted, and with every possible preparation made for the comfort of the party.

Alison and Hilda did not leave the carriage, but drove on, the former promising to return later in the day, when they should be settled in their new quarters.

Hilda, naturally, was tired from the long drive, yet there was a better color in her cheeks, a brightness in her eyes more encouraging than at any time since she had begun to convalesce, and in answer to Alison's query she declared it was a "*good* tired, the kind which makes one think of a nice long nap."

The quaint little village street came to an abrupt ending. The road it opened upon was more like a clearing, and there, just as Kate had told them, as if dropped down from above for a human habitation, stood Miss Homer's

little cottage, two rooms below, two above, and in the doorway the old lady herself, tall, thin, angular, and flat-chested, the typical "maiden lady" of the stage or romance, but with the very kindest of faces. Her hair, brushed back from behind her ears, and wound into a tight knot at the back of her head, was thin, dark, and plentifully streaked with gray, her mouth was drawn up into a comical pucker, as though she would like to "smile right out," as she used to say, but "didn't like to give way."

"Well," was Miss Homer's greeting, "so you're all here! Now, I guess you can come right in."

She gazed helplessly while Alison, whose years of foreign travel had taught her how to condense one's belongings, gathered the few packages together; she made a little rush at them then, and finally all were in the breezy, pine-scented parlor of the "Half House," whose quaint design, great open fireplace, deep-set windows, and floor shining from its beeswax scrubbing, made up an interior thoroughly justifying Kate's opinion, and when Hilda was seated in the deep easy chair, the pine logs crackling and burning merrily, Alison felt as though, to again quote the irrepressible Kate, "a good day's work" had indeed been done when they decided upon coming here and, as she gayly declared, she would get the best of it; they must not let her forget her mission as nurse, or she would make it all play!

When Hilda was made comfortable Miss Homer, with a very mysterious air, beckoned Alison into the room just across the hall. She opened the door, revealed a rather bare, but scrupulously clean kitchen with a little lean-to in the rear.

"There!" she said in her short, somewhat constrained

way; "it's the best I can do. You see, we hev to take our meals right here."

"And why not?" declared Alison, as, turning to the old lady, she held out her hands, saying in her gentlest tones: "Miss Homer, you and I must have some long talks some of these days, for you know we are related. At least——"

"Oh, I know," said the old lady. "You're Donald Fane's daughter and Rachel Broderick's grandchild! Aint much *kin*, but if you're one as cares for *family*, why, I guess I can give you your fill here. Most everyone round about comes to me when there's any papers to be drawed up or things like that. Why, Squire Jackson's girl Sarah'd never hev got a bit of the Home Farm if it 'twan't for me up and telling her grandma what she never knew of her own before or since! Well, now I'm glad you think my place 'll do. Jest you make yourselves to home, right straight off! There's only a narrer flight of stairs to climb up to your sleepin'-place, and I guess you'll live downstairs most all day."

Alison said she was sure they would, and leaving their kindly hostess in her kitchen, she went back to find Hilda languidly, but with great interest, moving about from one object in the quaint room to another, inspecting, enjoying everything, pleased as a child.

"And oh, draw in the smell of the pines!" said Alison. "Perfumes of Arabia! See," and she lifted some of the cones lying in the wood-basket, flinging them into the blaze on the hearth, "isn't that delicious, Hilda?"

"Like life," said the other girl, and leaning back in the low deep easy chair she watched Alison attentively. Alison was kneeling on the hearth, her eyes fixed on the blaze, her thoughts—where? Firelight brings strange fancies.

"Alison," said her companion in a very tender voice, and laying her hand on her friend's shoulder, "why are you so good to me? I wonder, dear, if I ever seem ungrateful? If so, I am not. I cannot tell you what I would do—be—to make you happy!"

"Happy!" echoed Alison, turning suddenly so that her friend saw tears lying on her dark lashes; "am I not, do you think? Well, if perhaps I am not always quite as happy as I might be, I have much—much to make me so!"

Hilda, made comfortable on the lounge with a little old-fashioned looking book Miss Homer had offered, Alison started across, up the road from the clearing, toward the inn, where, as she well knew, Agnes would be eagerly waiting for her, and Miss Blakesley, the nurse, would be ready, no doubt, to be relieved for an hour.

Mrs. Fenn's little hotel was soon in view, and presently Alison and Miss Blakesley, the young nurse, were chatting together, and, Alison understanding what to do, Miss Blakesley departed for a little stroll in the woodland and a much needed rest.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ALISON did not try to conceal her pleasure in welcoming Broderick as a guest in the Half House, where Miss Homer had already begun preparations for a supper worthy such an occasion; she, like most of the people who had worked under him, regarding Hugh in a peculiar light, as of far more importance than the actual master of the mills, even if he was only its foreman, and of himself a person of ideas and principles such as warranted his receiving an unstinted amount of attention and respect, and Broderick's manner toward the ancient lady was, Alison thought, quite perfect, combining that deference, which comes of a sense of chivalry in any honest-minded man toward the weaker sex, with a little good-humored banter which the spinster thoroughly enjoyed and parried with her own keen wit in a way which was amusing to them all.

Tea was served early on account of choir practice, which Alison had promised to attend, and was laid out in the fire-lit parlor, and if Alison's hands were nearly scalded through Broderick's clumsiness in trying to help her lift the tea kettle, at just the right moment, it only occasioned a general laugh and enabled Miss Homer to point a moral to her objection to that kind o' tea! But as Alison's eyes challenged Hugh to find fault with it he declared so promptly in favor of the new style, that Miss Homer's faith in herself was shaken, and she began to wonder if that wan't the way her grandmother Jackson used to make tea for her brother, who was a mate on a merchant vessel between here and Hong Kong.

This led to further reminiscences; to Miss Homer's admission that she had a few "olden time" things in the garret upstairs Alison might see if she liked, the next day; and when the meal ended and Hilda was comfortably settled on her lounge—Alison set out with her willing cavalier for the meeting-house and choir practice. Broderick enquired whether among other things she contemplated house-keeping?

Alison's eyes danced. "Yes," she assented lightly. "And, oh, to-morrow, or to-night, I'll tell you what you can do. I've a notion of—well, how the Half House could be improved and enlarged a bit with very little expense. Will you help me draw out a plan?"

"See here!" declared Broderick. "You're far deeper than you look! I believe you have a plant of some kind at work. What does a small young thing like you want with houses, and—well, different things?"

"*Half* houses," corrected the girl gayly, "and haven't I an old age to consider. Oh, but I'm a prudent one! I don't mean to be an incumbrance or homeless or anything like that in my ripe old age, when I wear a cap and spectacles. I'm 'saving the pence,' as the old adage recommends."

"Well, to quote your own phrase, we'll see. Now, here we are. May I ask what you intend to sing?" The meeting-house was a long, narrow building of pine once painted a reddish brown. Within was a high-shouldered sort of loft or gallery into which Alison and Broderick were conducted by two or three prominent members as soon as they appeared, and where presently her clear, soft, very sweet, but never brilliant, voice was uplifted, first in "Rock of Ages," then in "Nearer, my God, to Thee," finally, with Hugh's voice joining hers, in "As Pants the Hart

for Cooling Streams." Even while the little company gathered about was complimenting her in the half shy, rural fashion, the girl said very little, but when they were out on the roadway again for the homeward walk she observed quietly:

"You never told me you could sing."

"Can I?"

"You could in time. When we go home will you sing for Hilda and Miss Homer and me?"

"Yes, perhaps."

"We are not late. When we get home we will amuse Hilda by our house-planning. Just now, understand, I want chiefly to be amused."

They were soon close to their journey's end. The light of the queer little Half House twinkled out, cheery red and yellow gleams across the woodland.

"Dear little place," said Alison. "Yes, some day I feel sure it will be mine! Come in now and show us how it can best be made into a whole house. But mind! you must not hurt its peculiar character, its primitive simplicity—what shall I call it?"

In a moment more they were in the cheery little parlor, and Miss Homer from the kitchen called out:

"Well, I guess you've about practised all 'll be sung down there for a year to come!"

And when Alison went in with sparkling eyes and cheeks rosy from the cold night air to say that she felt in an excellent frame of mind toward something eatable, Miss Homer, to use her own expression, "brisked about," producing home-made cider, the famous pies, and bread as well "raised" as ever heart of man could wish.

"Are we to consider mere expenditure?" said Broderick

looking across the table half an hour later, "or am I to make a reckless, Vanderbiltian sketch?"

The lamp burned cheerily. Alison had her knitting, facing Hugh. Hilda was reclining in an easy chair, and Miss Homer was darning stockings on the third side of the table.

"Oh, of course!" said Alison promptly. "Miss Homer, just listen to him! No; we can afford to spend—well, just fifteen hundred dollars."

Hugh laughed back at her. "Why, for that I can design you something wonderfully good. The living-room must be large and with several windows."

"Yes, and a very big, old-fashioned fireplace."

His pencil moved now, rapidly. Its sound and the occasional falling of the logs on the hearth alone broke the stillness.

Alison gave the lamp a little screw up and down, hoping to increase its brilliancy, and at last Hugh stood up, bringing his chair and the drawing around to where she sat.

"There," he said, now evidently as much interested as Alison had been herself. "What do you say to this? Can you all see? The entrance leads directly into the living room, but you will see that I have devised a side door where in wet weather people can go in and so not disturb the exquisite cleanliness of your floor; and I have suggested a half door—see, one of those delightful old-time doorways, with two parts. Now, here is your home room."

It was sketched with windows back and front, with the little "L" Alison's fancy coveted for a sort of reading recess, and where divans would come in delightfully. The fireplace was quite ample enough to satisfy even her

ambition for such a "house place." A square recess in the hall at the lower end of the room was explained to mean shelves "for all your valuable bric-a-brac and your yellow or green silk curtaining. Green with pink threads, wasn't it?" added Hugh with a twinkle in his eyes as he looked at Alison.

A small dining room and a kitchen with the lean-to for which Miss Homer pleaded, was on the same floor, and a tiny room whose object, when pressed for an explanation, Broderick said he meant for the study of the lady of the house, and his pencil indicated various little points where her desk, her special chair, table, etc., her bookshelves were to be placed.

Upstairs he had designed four sleeping rooms around a square hall—the staircase being well contrived from the back of the house.

"Subject to a builder who understood his work," said Broderick finally, "I'll venture to say you could do it all nicely for your fifteen hundred dollars, or less."

He was about to tear the paper up, when Alison, with a frightened "Oh!" put out her hand and drew it quickly toward her.

Then they all sang in turn some old familiar songs, and finally Miss Homer stood up, without any awkwardness, and a singularly sweet, gentle look on her plain face. She coughed once or twice, and then in a high-pitched, quavering, yet by no means unmelodious voice, sang quietly:

"Father of heaven and earth,
I bless thee for the night,
The soft, still, night !
The holy pause of care and mirth
Of sound and light !

“ Yes, ere I sink to rest,
By the fire's dying light,
Thou Lord of earth and heaven !
I bless thee who has given
Unto life's fainting travellers
The night—the soft, still night.” *

“ Aint sung that since Jane Doyle was buried,” remarked Miss Homer, calmly sitting down again; “ she liked to hear it nights when I sot up with her.”

“ It will be my good-night,” said Broderick, as he stood up; “ and I'll carry it all the way back to Mrs. Fenn's with me.”

*Mrs. Hemans.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ONE sharp, cold afternoon in the same November the young ladies employed at Been & Harrison's were "in evidence," very promptly on the sounding of the hour for closing and taking stock, and two or three who managed to escape five minutes ahead of schedule time to the dressing-rooms exchanged eager confidences over some pleasure in view for the evening, lamenting in good-natured tones the fact that our friend Molly Norton could not accompany them.

"You don't look a bit well, either, Molly dear," said a tall, dark-eyed young girl, giving a little shake and shiver to her shoulders and skirts as she withdrew reluctantly from the one looking-glass the room afforded; "I was noticing that to Bobby only yesterday."

"No, I don't feel particularly well," assented Molly, and added with a faint little smile: "I guess you'll believe me, Bella, when I tell you I could have gone to the ball, and wouldn't!"

"What!" was chorused, as all eyes turned upon the misguided creature who had refused to enter Elysium when its gates opened, and then "Who asked you?" followed as quickly and eagerly.

"Oh, Johnny, of course; thinks I'm dying for it, I suppose. No, I really didn't feel equal to it. Well, good-by. So long," and Molly, in her rather shabby outdoor garments, departed, hurrying along the lower passage way and to the entrance on the side street, where in the autumn

dusk, or rather early nightfall, the light of a street lamp showed a snow-encrusted, treacherous-looking pavement.

"Take care!" said a man's voice, and Molly, saved from stumbling, looked up under the yellow glow to blush scarlet, and say demurely: "That you, Billy," as Mr. Billy Rokesmith tucked her hand under his arm and asked her what she meant by not being on the lookout for him.

"Well, I was thinking of you anyway, Billy," said the young girl, with a glance up at the plain, honest face of the man beside her, "and never dreaming you were right there."

"Well, you see, Mary," he answered, "I had to be, for it's important I should go home with you, and tell your folks just how it stands."

"But, Billy," pleaded Molly, pressing his arm closely; "don't you see just what they'd all say? And wouldn't I be mean—too mean to have you care a fig for me, if I'd get married and go off just when times are so hard—anyhow at home."

"Now, who's asked you?" exclaimed Billy. "Just you wait a bit! I'm only going to put things right on the fair and square. I'm going to say like this: Here are Molly and me, engaged for going on two years,—'tis that, aint it, Molly?—and now I have a chance to better things, I think, by going out West, and I don't want to leave without some very clear understanding. Now, that's about the size of it."

"Well, Billy, of course you know best," said Molly, in a very small voice. "Suppose—you never came back?"

He laughed gayly. "And *that's* the secret, is it? Mary, my dear," the young fellow dropped his tone of banter, and turning around looked at the girl steadily as they both

stood facing each other an instant in the windy twilight, "remember that day of the picnic——"

Molly turned her head. Her cheeks were crimson. "Guess I do, Billy," she whispered, and then raised her eyes suddenly to see quite a look of pain on the honest, kindly face bent above her.

"Think a man that did all that for a girl is likely to go back on his word. Oh, no! Do you remember," he added, as they resumed their walk, "I hadn't asked you outright then, and I told you those picnics weren't fit for you to go to. Well, sir, when I saw you bent on it, thinks I, I'll just see the thing all out; so you went and I stood it until you got up to dance with that cur, Peter Donelly! Jingo, how it made me feel! If you'd been my sister, Molly, my dear, I couldn't have felt worse, so up I stepped—do you remember?—and says I, this young lady's made a mistake, sir, she's engaged to me for this dance, and then——"

Molly shivered. She remembered too well the altercation that ensued, how in the general confusion blows were dealt out freely, and in some fashion Billy contrived to get her away and on to the first ferryboat that was crossing, how he took her home straight away to her mother's, and there on the doorstep read her such a lecture as she never could or would forget! Molly's cheeks burned now recalling it! How low her tastes, her ideas seemed in the light of Billy's strong denunciations!

All that seemed a long time ago now to the young people as they trod the same ground again, only now, the cup of happiness had been running low for many a day. "Hard times" pressed on all sides and, instead of the wedding bells which they had hoped to set ringing, there was the dismal note of what might be endless separation.

"Don't say a word just at first," whispered Molly, as

the house door came in view. "I'll give you a hint of a good time for it."

And as they were admitted into the hall, Nora exclaimed quickly:

"O Billy, glad to see you! Here's a letter from Miss Fane; she wants some business attended to, and ma, she said right off you might do it, seein' Connor's not home."

"Why, certainly," said Mr. Rokesmith, holding his head up a trifle higher. "Business, did you say?"

And he followed the girls down to the front basement with a little cough, half apologetic, half to clear his throat in case oratory was required. Meanwhile Molly's very footsteps showed her satisfaction. "Talk about Connor," she was thinking, "when Billy Rokesmith's around. I guess Connor isn't in it!"

And then she fell to wondering what it could be Miss Fane had to consult them about.

Mrs. Norton was the centre of a speechless but excited group, who were listening to the third or fourth very careful reading of a letter just received from Alison, which was now promptly handed over to young Rokesmith in order that his interpretation and advice could be added to the general fund.

"DEAR MRS. NORTON [the letter ran]: I wish a little business matter promptly and carefully transacted, and think perhaps it will be in Mr. Connor's line. At all events, I am sure you will only give it to a responsible party. I have good reason for not sending by mail. Kindly have the enclosed note taken in person and a written answer obtained, which you can mail me. I enclose ten dollars to defray all expenses, etc. I may see you some day very soon. Meanwhile I trust all are well

and prospering, particularly Molly ["Ahem!" from Mr. Rokesmith], and give my love to all.

"Yours cordially,

"ALISON M. FANE."

"Here, Billy!" exclaimed Nora eagerly, "here's the enclosed note;" and she handed him a carefully sealed envelope, the address upon which he read aloud slowly, almost solemnly:

"JOHN ROBBINS, ESQ.,
North Main Street,
Branley, N. J."

"H'm, h'm; well, well, yes," said the oracle. "I can get down there and back easy enough to-night. It's this side of Trenton, considerably—Branley." He felt for his watch, coughed again, and consulted the timepiece on the mantel. "I guess I'd better get off as quick as I can eat a bite or two."

"Well, I declare!" said Mrs. Norton. "I told you we'd hear more of that poor dear child yet! Hurry up, girls, can't you? Where's the paper to see about trains. Get Billy's supper, some of you."

And while Mr. Rokesmith, highly established in the good graces of the family by his ability to go on this mysterious errand, examined the N. J. C. time-tables with the knitted brow of one on whom a heavy responsibility rested, the girls flew about, and presently a very substantial repast was set before the prospective traveller.

And just two hours later Mr. Rokesmith was ringing the bell of a neat little brown-painted frame house at the

extreme end of North Main Street in the small but picturesque township of Branley. He was very cold, but still impressed by the importance of his mission, all the more so when, after being admitted, Mr. Robbins, reading the note once or twice carefully, stared at him, saying rather anxiously:

"I suppose—well, of course if you weren't a trusty messenger, sir, you wouldn't be here. Miss Fane has sent for the certified copy of a most important paper which she left for safe-keeping in my hands. She says she must have it immediately. Now as I can't possibly get to town myself, may I ask you, sir, to send the document, by express, carefully registered, the very first thing in the morning?"

And as a result the first train after 9 A. M. the next day carried to our heroine the certified copy of the last will and testament of the late Mrs. Rachel Broderick, while at eleven o'clock the morning following Mrs. Norton's quiet household was once more roused and excited by a telegram which read as follows:

"Will arrive with a friend by 4 P. M.

"ALISON FANE."

CHAPTER XL.

It was perhaps natural—so at least Alison tried to make herself feel—that after the idyllic sojourn in Miss Homer's cottage, a return to the dull routine work at Exeford should seem dreary and dismally commonplace, and if Mr. Gray Gorman had found reason to complain of her before, he had very evident cause for dissatisfaction in the lack of energy she now displayed, but it was certainly not on the cards for him to express any such feelings, and he, accordingly, confined himself more than usual to his special office, preferring to avoid that one particular hand whenever he was able to do so.

This would have only caused Alison to rejoice in secret and made her better pleased with her daily lot had other matters followed suit, but there had come a curious, wholly unaccountable constraint into Broderick's manner. That he had heard nothing in New York to warrant it, she felt sure, since his visit there had come to so abrupt a close her commissions even went unfulfilled. Affairs at the mill had called him back. Something was brewing, Gorman was dissatisfied and surly; the men, talking in low tones, were constantly to be found in little groups, which dissolved on the approach either of Broderick or Gorman. An air of sullen indifference pervaded the atmosphere during working hours, very different from the former hum and buzz of talk, and pay day saw more than once the withdrawal of some hand who received his wages and quit for good in the same hour.

Just what it meant no one could have told, and so indefinable was the cloud that it was not even talked about among those conscious of its oppression, but even this, Alison felt sure, could not wholly explain Broderick's peculiar reserve, preoccupation, evident avoidance of her, and she at last determined to adopt the course which her common sense and natural frankness suggested—*i. e.*, when an opportunity offered, to ask him candidly what had occurred to make him so very distant since their little holiday in Pendarley woods.

Hilda was better, yet not strong by any means, a fact Alison had communicated to Dr. Holton, who in turn wrote, saying to expect him any day that week; and, as it was now Friday and Alison concluded he might appear on the late train that evening, she had promised to leave early. Hilda had as yet not been able to think of resuming work.

Alison was well enough pleased to leave the workroom where the occasional appearance of Broderick, pale, anxious in expression, and with more than ordinary preoccupation of manner, had not tended to make her feel particularly happy. It was not six o'clock when she folded up her work, slipped off her apron, made her report briefly, and put on her out-door costume, wishing she had good company for a brisk walk before returning home. The night air blew cold but invigorating on her flushed cheeks as she emerged from the big gateway of Gorman's and started up the street, deciding upon a short *détour* in order to enquire for the wife of a young hand, whom she knew to be quite ill, guessed to be in troubled circumstances, since her husband was one of the malcontents who had discharged himself the week before, and about whom she and Broderick had indulged in a brief passage

at arms which left them only more ill at ease in each other's company than before. Alison, conscious of having said the bitterest words of the two, was less ready to feel, or show that she was penitent; and indeed, her only regret was in having spoken at all, her sense of the workman's right and Broderick's harshness remained the same, while Broderick, it was clear, considered their dispute fresh cause for reticence, and, wherever it could be managed, for complete avoidance of her.

The workman, Jake Marks by name, occupied the upper floor of a small cottage on one of the side streets which had in a meaningless fashion, apparently, wandered off from a main road, and evidently realizing its inability to hold up its head and demand a name, ended abruptly in a despondent-looking, stubbly field which Mr. Marks' family sitting-room overlooked. Blue glaze curtaining shone in the light of the kerosene lamps within as Alison paused on the doorstep, not knowing whether to open the unpainted door for herself, or go through the formality of knocking.

Her doubt, however, was unexpectedly settled by the turning of the loose knob and the appearance of Mr. Marks himself, followed by half a dozen unkempt-looking men, all talking eagerly, but who stopped short on catching sight of the visitor, whom Marks, however, made haste to welcome in his half shy, half rough, fashion. It was by no means her first visit since his wife's illness, and he knew that all the comfort in the family had of late come through her.

"Hello! that you, Miss Fane? She'll be glad to see ye! The boys and me's just going out on a little matter of business—get out of the lady's way, can't ye, Jenkins?—go right along up, Miss Fane. Jenny's in the bedroom;

been down again all day." And as Alison, anxious to avoid the notice of the company, hastened up the rickety staircase, Marks let the men troop out ahead of him, saying to a little undersized fellow in the rear as they went up the short plank walk to the main road:

"That's the sort o' stuff that does it! That girl's smarter'n most any ten men ye'd find. I don't know how my woman'd hev pulled through this spell if it hadn't a'ben for her!" and as the little man nodded his head emphatically, Marks continued: "She'll giv' her a good cheerin' up, I'll be bound! Come on, you fellows!" he added with quick relapse of manner; "do you mean to let the game clean outer yer hands, ye can fool along like that?"

Alison, meanwhile, had hurried up the little staircase, oppressed by that nameless dread of something, almost tragic, which had haunted her lately, having Broderick as its central object. The first glance at the nearly bare, untidy little sitting-room did not tend to encourage her. The workman of Exeford, as a rule, was singularly temperate—indeed so abstemious that a famous lecturer on the "accursed glass" had been at a loss to understand the peculiar attitude of his audience both during and after his well-known and thrilling lecture. As a lesson it was so apparently needless, that the audience, after a vague effort to get quite *en rapport* with the speaker, at last concluded it to be purely humorous, and accepting it from this point of view, gave way to unrestrained laughter and applause at every telling point, his mystification being quite complete when one of the committee approached him at the close of the lecture, intimating he could have a little "nip" up at his house if he liked. "But not at the hotel, you see, colonel," said the genial Exefordian, "'cause, you

see, it's a strictly temperance town. I don't suppose," added the unconscious humorist, "a man in the audience to-night has tasted anything stronger than new cider in five years, 'cept when he 'lows himself, once a year or so, a few day's harmless fun over to Exetown."

Alison's first glance at Jake Mark's sitting-room showed that for once the rules of Exeford had been broken into. A dozen empty beer bottles and two or three empty whiskey flasks stood about; the atmosphere was heavy with the odors of recent libations and tobacco smoke, through which Alison, making a little grimace of disgust, passed hastily into the little bedroom beyond, where Jenny Marks and her thin three weeks' old baby lay in the semi-darkness; the baby, poor little mite, sleeping peacefully, Jenny's sobs audibly pathetic in this miserable, unlovely picture of a falling home.

"Why, Jenny!" exclaimed Alison in softest accents, "crying, and in the dark! Come, now! I dare say you haven't had any supper yet! And where is that Mrs. Bates downstairs? She promised you shouldn't be left this way again."

Ailson had already laid aside her hat and jacket and was rubbing her chilled hands before touching the invalid or the baby.

"He-he-he's go-gone out—with the boy-boys," sobbed Jenny, drying her eyes on the corner of the sheet nearest her. "Oh, Miss Fane, there's trouble a-brewing for Gorman's! And Marks he won't be said by me!"

"Never mind!" declared Alison cheerily. "I want you to eat something nice—and, let me see! Why, I declare, your fire's all out!"

She set to work vigorously,—how she recalled those moments later!—contrived to make a fairly good fire out

of such materials as the wood-box offered, put on the kettle, and very soon, with such materials as she purchased from a slatternly woman below, had a cup of tea and some toast ready, and was about to sweep up the forlorn little sitting-room when Jenny Marks fairly paralyzed the very working of her brain for an instant it seemed.

"They're bent on mischief to-night, Miss Fane!" said Jenny. "And they've liquor in 'em too, you see! Broderick he won't take 'em back without they sign certain papers agreein' not to strike this kind o' way, and Gorman he's riled 'em so,—even Broderick is comin' over now,—they've gone up now to the mills bent on mischief! Goin' to smash somethin' while Broderick's away! I dunno just what, but it's to pay out Gorman; little Tommy Ford's got a key 'll let 'em in. Oh, they'd *kill* me," added Jenny in a weaker voice, "if they knew I told; but I can't help it! My man wouldn't have been in it if he'd let the drink alone, and its *him* I'm thinkin' of."

"Jenny!" cried Alison, her brain suddenly seeming to whirl and then stand still; "did you say they were going up to the mills *now*, and they thought Hugh Broderick was still away!"

Jenny with a suddenly scared face nodded, her eyes fixed on Alison's figure as she stood there, her hands pressed to her temples.

"But he is home!" she said in a low, terrified voice; "he is up there *now*! Jenny, I *won't* make trouble for you, my dear! Don't," as the feeble little baby on the girl's arm moaned; "don't be frightened a bit, only, I must go away for a little while;"—she was hurriedly putting on her out-door garments—"I'll be back soon—I'll send Mrs. Bates up to you, dear! Now, don't worry!" And then in a way which she never later could distinctly recall,

Alison managed to get down the staircase, and by means of a fifty cent piece slipped into her dirty hand induced the woman from below to look after Jake Marks' wife for an hour or so, and then with a wild lifting of her face and an audible prayer to Heaven for aid, she was out and up the road once more to the mills, never so anxious to reach its grim entrance since the day which had seen her first enter as one of Gorman's hands! It had begun to rain—a cold, miserable little downpour which Alison never heeded, though it wet and chilled her. Her feet seemed made of lead as she tried to urge them on. The towers of the factory came in view at last; the gloomy-looking gateway was open, and with a feeling which never was or could be described, the girl made her way down the short flight of stone steps, aware at once that the light in Broderick's special window was still burning.

Whether it augured well or ill she dared not think; to get there, to find, to warn him of the danger impending, was her only thought as she half blindly struggled on; now, not even surprised to find the staircase entrance door unlocked and swinging open.

She grasped the battered wooden railing for support as she tried to hurry up the narrow steps; but a deadly, sickening feeling, a nameless dread, a terror, inspired by the silence and the open door, made her faint and dizzy. Once she stopped, just where the steps turned to lead into the narrow hall, called out: "Hugh—Hugh Broderick," her voice dying away unanswered in the darkness and solitude she was in, and then, through an open window which let in the wind and rain, came in the glimmer of the street lamp, and by its glare Alison pressed forward, pushing back the swinging door of Broderick's office.

For one instant she stood rooted to the spot, and then a

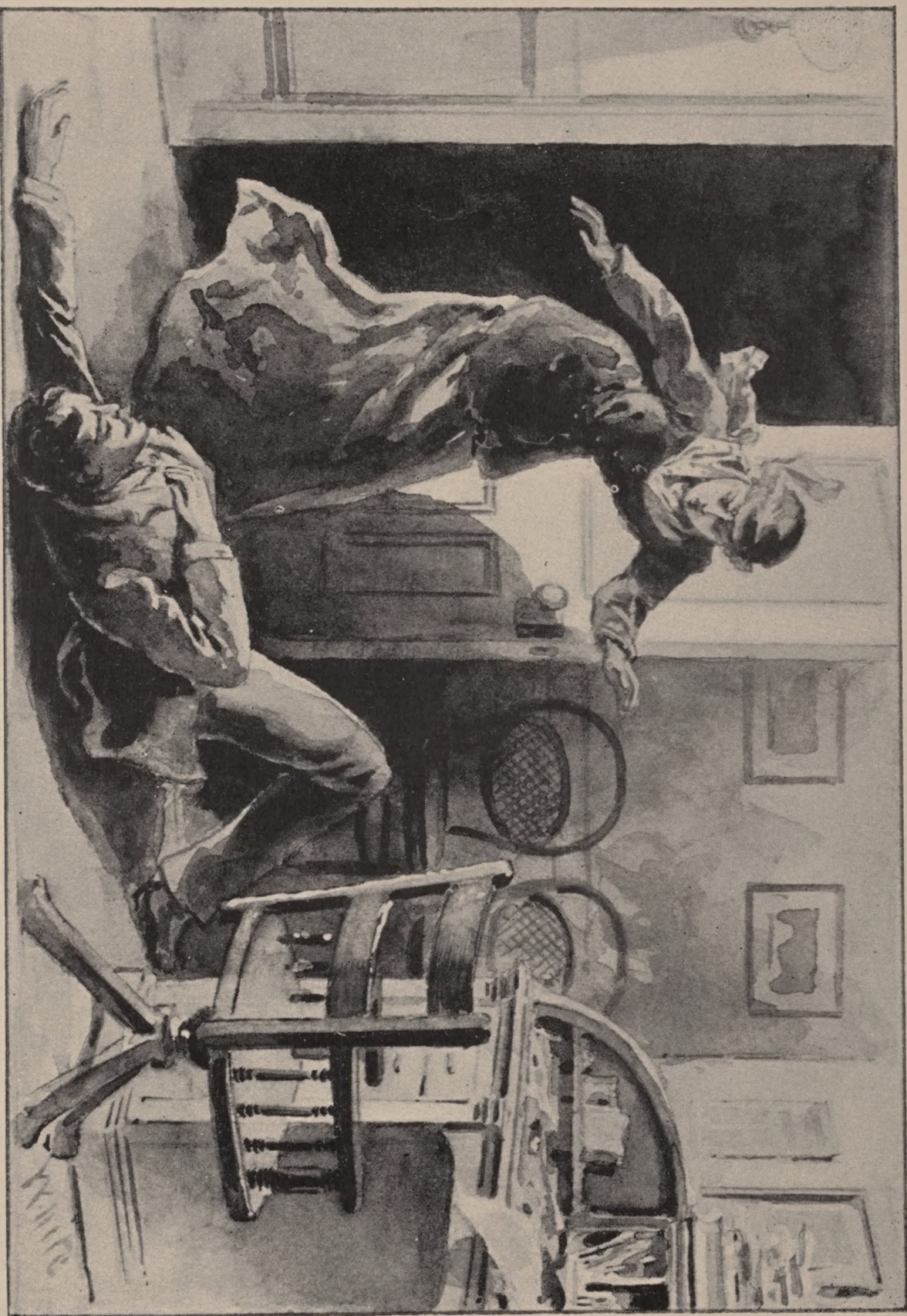
cry, such as pierced the outer gloom and darkness, and stopped the quickest walker on the streets, rent the air; for before her, on the floor, apparently in his life's blood, lay Broderick, stricken, felled by some unseen adversary, who had made good his escape! Dead or dying—which was it? Alison knew not, did not stop to think. That he had been the victim of a brutal attack was clear; how could she, if at all, save the life that *might* be lingering in his veins, was her one thought as she flung herself on her knees beside him, and lifting him up in her arms kissed his brow, his eyes, his cold, white lips, calling upon him to look at her, speak to her, tell her how to save him!

How or whence came her strength and instinct she could not tell, but in a moment Alison had torn off her white skirt, and tearing it into strips bound up the wound on his head, stanching the blood flowing from his arm and then bandaging that, if clumsily, at least securely, some remembrance of having seen the same course followed coming to her aid. A feeble moan was the only indication of life as she tried to make his poor wounded body comfortable, while from the faucet in the room she filled a grimy glass with water and held it to his lips, her arm supporting his head, and slowly, tremulously the eyelids of the wounded man moved; the eyes gazed vacantly at first, but then lit by a sudden gleam of recognition, straight into her own, and a smile, ineffably tender, crossed the man's white face.

"My—sweetheart," he said faintly, and tried, vainly, to lift his hand and touch her cheek.

Tears were raining unchecked down the girl's white cheeks, but she did not loose her hold nor move her eyes.

"Dearest," she said in a low voice, music itself to the man's ears, "you will get well—thank God! I found you! Keep still! I dare not let you move."



THE MILL TRAGEDY.

But Broderick's faintly returning strength had quickly given way, and when the steps of those hurrying along the courtyard drew nearer, came up the staircase and what seemed a crowd of people burst into the room, he was in a swoon, as deadly, it seemed, as that in which Alison had found him, and her face, as she gazed down at him and then at the men and women who had answered that despairing cry, was white and set as marble, with a look on it no one present ever could forget.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE confusion which ensued can, I think, be as well imagined as described. From somewhere in the gathering crowd at last Dr. Egerton's figure appeared, question and answer followed rapidly, Alison only saying she had gone back on business, and found Broderick, as she thought, dead. Two constables cross-questioned her, but to no further purpose; some instinct kept her from revealing what Jenny Marks had told her, a sense of gratitude to the little woman urging her silence, and when Dr. Egerton and Dr. Pulsifer said: "Life just saved," Alison felt faint and dizzy with the thought of how nearly it had come to being otherwise!

Naturally the Gormans were soon on hand: father and son alike busy, pompous, angry, and excited. Alison never quite knew how it was that Hugh's still nearly lifeless form was borne away to his little lodging, and that someone offered to drive her back to Bend Lane. She heard the words, "She may be needed as a witness," but they meant very little until once more in her own rooms, with Hilda and Janet, who lamented loudly and despairingly, she realized what the "maybe" implied, if he had indeed met his death! The first moment of relief was when Hilda, catching her hand, whispered tremulously:

"Dr. Holton will be here to-morrow!" How fortunate it seemed, and yet——

Alison, shaken by the terrible ordeal she had gone through, flung her arms about old Janet and sobbed as though her heart would break.

"I know, honey!" whispered the old woman, stroking Alison's head tenderly. "Never mind; I'll take ye up myself to see him to-morrow!"

And all through the dreary winter's night Alison lay sleepless, her eyes strained and burning, waiting for the morning and the fulfilment of the old woman's promise. And through the watches, the eager, fitful prayers, of that night, there came back full remembrance of what had passed between Broderick and herself in that despairing moment when she had thought him dying, his ears deaf to every sound! The color flamed into her face in the darkness, and Alison wondered how she could speak to him again! Come what might, thought Alison, this much at least would remain to her—he loved her! In those awful moments when the thought of death stripped conventionality's chill covering, they had seen into each other's hearts and spoken as though bidden to do so by God's very angel!

But daybreak, and the making ready to go up to the cottage which Hugh Broderick called home, brought the necessary though sad duties of the day to Alison, for already it had been reported that the doctors had but little hope of Broderick's recovery, and that some arrests had been promptly made.

"We must not forget Jake Marks' wife," said Alison wearily, as she forced herself to drink the coffee Janet had made ready.

"Oh, I'm thinking of that lad yonder!" retorted Janet, whose old face was pathetic in its misery; "she's but a young woman and can get well, I guess."

How often, thought Alison, as they hurried along through the almost silent, bitterly cold streets, had she planned a visit, or at least wished it could be compassed,

to the lodging where she was so sure Hugh cared nothing for the daintinesses nor shared the real comforts of life; and how little had she thought that his mortal peril would for the first time bring her there!

"O Janet!" she exclaimed, as they drew near the road on which in one of three or four cottages they were told "Mr. Broderick's house" was to be found, "couldn't we fix it so that you could come and take care of him? I'd feel more comfortable then."

"Well!" said the old woman, with her wrinkled smile, "I was just going to put the same idee to you, my dear! I'll see how the land lays."

Poorly enough, was Alison's first thought as, admitted by a tall, depressed looking woman she recollected to have seen in church, they found themselves ushered into a small, cheerless sitting-room whose only approach to comfort was the evidently newly lighted fire in a stove smelling badly of varnish.

"He's—well—conscious," said the woman. "The doctors will be along pretty soon; I guess they think it a pretty bad case, for there's eight men, I'm told, locked up. Gorman's sent for a reg'lar nurse, I understand. Well, I'll jist step in—my Sammy's a-sittin' by him—and see, Miss Fane, if you kin take a peep at him."

Alison restlessly paced the floor. Janet stood grimly in the window.

"Her *Sammy*!" said old Janet, with a low sniff of contempt. "I guess he must be well taken care of at that rate!"

The gray light of the morning had given way to a faint sunrise, and Alison found herself mechanically looking about at the objects in the little room, all of which seemed pathetic in their uselessness, in the master's absence.

Bare and simple as the room was, it was not in bad taste: the colors dark, the furniture solid, the few ornamental touches good, the two or three engravings well chosen; yet it was dreary and utterly unhomelike! Alison lifted one of the pipes on the mantel, wondered what thoughts had woven themselves out of the cloud-wreaths it had formed, looked down at the well-worn leathern chair, pictured Broderick sitting there alone on some of those wildly stormy Sundays of late, and then the door was opened. Mrs. Coan, more funereal than ever in manner, motioned to her visitors and they followed her up the narrow little staircase into the bedroom where Broderick lay.

His eyes, fixed on the door, showed that he was conscious, that he knew whom to expect, but their light was painfully faint even as he tried to smile, stretching out one hand, the left; the right arm and hand were bandaged.

Alison forced herself to complete control, and tried to say even with a cheery smile as she bent over him:

"You are getting better; and Janet has come to take care of you."

He did not loose the hold upon her little trembling hand, but moved his eyes toward Janet.

"Yes, my lad!" said the old woman grimly, and resting her hands firmly on the footboard of the bed. "I'm come to *stay* till I see you on your feet again."

"Alison, then it *was* you I remember with me that night?" Broderick said in a faint voice.

The color flamed into her pale face, but she said quietly:

"Yes, it was I."

"Do they say I will get well?"

"Yes, we hope so. But you are not to move or talk, and if I do not come again for a day or two to see you it will only be because they wish you to be absolutely

quiet. I shall be thinking of you every minute, praying for you. Now it must be good-by for a little while, but old Janet will stay. Get well"—her eyelids fell, but she raised them again quickly—"for my—for all our sakes!"

His fingers closed again on hers; he smiled, and Alison, feeling that to stay an instant longer would be to betray her fears for the worst and so unnerve him, looked up, relieved to find that old Janet and the careful, if loose-limbed Sammy were returning.

And the time had come now, surely, for some action. It was not possible to believe the men had aimed that blow deliberately at Broderick. No; far more likely that they had intended something very different—that surprised by Broderick's unexpected appearance they had struck out, wishing to escape. Alison's head was burning, but clear as a noonday bell now that the necessity for thought and action had combined to rouse every faculty; and, if Broderick's life were spared, might there not as well be his character to completely vindicate; his position to make sure? And at all events, the gross injustice shown the employees now out of work was warrant enough for her to in some way use her hidden power.

But with her burning sense of indignation came justice to all as well, and Alison, as she and old Janet hurried along the cold, windy streets of the town, remembered her talk with Gray Gorman; knew all that his father's failure would mean to various households; and litigation of any sort she dreaded, both in its course and results; since it might end only in leaving her mistress of bare walls and a dissolved company. A fair, clear, sensible discussion with some wiser head than her own, some purely disinterested individual, would be everything, the girl felt at this moment. Dr. Holton would be of some use, but he could

not be expected to have the mature judgment Alison felt she needed. And then, suddenly, there flashed across her mind remembrance of a paragraph she had seen in a New York paper only the day before. It announced the arrival at the Everett House of the Hon. G. F. Winstane, with the fact that he expected to remain three days in town.

"The very one to go to!" thought the girl, with a bounding of her heart. "He is wise, clear-headed, cool, above all, a thorough gentleman and entirely disinterested. New York of course must be my heading-point at once. I can do two or three things there. Dare I leave Broderick? And who will go with me?"

And then, with another wave of relief, Alison remembered Dr. Holton would arrive that day. He could so far be taken into her counsels as to be told her presence in New York was needed, and his escort most to be desired.

After all, part of the tangle was unravelling! And, but for the dark shadow of Broderick's illness, Alison would have felt singularly light-hearted in having the ends of the main difficulties in her life so well in hand as she once more entered the little Bend Lane cottage, gave Hilda, who was wide awake and breathless with anxiety, her report, and then set out to enquire for Jake Marks' poor little wife, reassure her anxiety, and if possible demand the whole history of last night's assault from Marks himself.

And eight o'clock the next morning saw Alison's telegram to her old friends in Benton Place on its way. Dr. Holton had arrived, had seen Hilda, heard all the strange story of the past few days; called upon Broderick, whom he reported to Alison, as he believed, out of danger so far as his life was concerned; yet as to what use his right arm would ever be again, time alone could tell.

And after this Alison would hesitate no longer. Her duty seemed not only imperative, but very clear. And with the young doctor's help and escort why should not Hilda herself accompany her? Miss Homer she knew would stay a few days at the Bend Lane house, for of course Janet must not leave Broderick an hour. It all seemed so perfectly easy and simple to Alison that she was impatient of the trivial excuses for delay and complication the others made, but that astute young person, Miss Egerton, begged of her to remember she had "men to deal with; and, my dear," said Kitty, with her nose uplifted, "did you ever know of their hurrying about anything? Why, one man and a boy can keep a whole houseful waiting while they're beginning to think what to do next!"

One thing Alison dared not trust herself to venture upon—another word with Broderick. No, it would reveal, perhaps demand, too much, but she despatched a line, brief enough, yet written over twenty times before she could feel it contained a message and a word of comfort combined:

"I must start at once on business for New York, and will write from there. I shall be back soon. Meantime think of me and get well.

"ALISON."

And so, once more, but under what strange circumstances! did our heroine set forth on a second all-important journey. This time, in spite of some difficulty in arranging it, she contrived that the trip be made with every possible luxury the trains and boats afforded, Hilda's weakness being her excuse, and she was forced by the young doctor's evident reluctance in the matter to whisper a word or two which showed him that her business in

New York involved the taking possession of quite a valuable property, and at least she assured him there was "money in it" for her at the journey's end.

There was a relief in leaving the confusion and excitement of the past few days behind her to our heroine, who found time for quiet, hopeful thoughts as they sped onward to New York again, and the glare of the electric lights on the wintry streets seemed to her peculiarly friendly, as, emerging from the big depot, Alison and Hilda were put into a cab by the young doctor, who promised smilingly to look in upon them later, Alison quite well understanding what his significant glance and smile included, and Hilda's pretty blush being equally intelligible.

And so once more the corner on which Mrs. Norton's cheerful, busy house stood came in view; once more was Alison welcomed with the most effusive cordiality, extended to the shy Hilda, who was, however, forced at once to feel one of themselves, while the prompt clatter of dishes, the darting downstairs of the older girls, heralded the announcement of supper, where Connor, quite a hero, shared the dignity of receiving the guests with that very valiant individual, Mr. William Rokesmith, Jr.

CHAPTER XLII.

“Now, then, for a very critical interview!”

Alison's heart beat quickly with this thought as she sat in a small reception-room at the Everett House, wondering just how and what to say to the distinguished gentleman from Washington, to whom she had sent up her card.

It was the morning after her arrival in New York. At as early an hour as she thought it likely he could be visible Alison had driven to the Everett House, dressed with perfect simplicity, but exquisite taste, quite well aware that a *bourgeoise* appearance would have been thoroughly out of place; and it was like a return to her old life, that far-away existence of happy, prosperous travel, of delicate surroundings, and harmonious influences, to find herself sitting in the well-appointed room, a long mirror reflecting the Alison Fane of older days, not simply Gorman's "hand," and yet—yet—Alison's long-drawn sigh betrayed what was her one constant, aching anxiety. The stream of life, ebbing and flowing just below the window in which she sat, interested, or I should say occupied her attention, in a way which amused her not a little, as marking the effect a few months had produced in her view of externals as well as every-day methods. She enjoyed it, liked it all; with an almost child-like pleasure thought what it would be in days to come to make little journeys down here to brighten up one's faculties, to keep off the rust of commonplace, and then started as she heard herself

addressed in pleasant, welcoming tones by Colonel Winstane himself.

"My dear young lady," said the Washingtonian cheerily, "this is a pleasure! I have so often thought of that pleasant evening! And I am delighted my girls are with me, and one of my sons, too. Our Harvard boy."

"Thank you, sir," said Alison quickly; "I shall be only too glad to see—to know them. May I have a few minutes of your time for a very important business matter?"

"Certainly, my dear," said the colonel, rising from the arm-chair he had taken; "I was just about taking you into our parlor. I'll introduce my girls and send them off for a while."

The parlor was on the same floor. The colonel led the way, talking affably, opened a door at the first turning, and at once, in a large, richly upholstered room, two young ladies in morning attire turned from the window, came forward, and were introduced as "my daughters, Rhoda and Millicent"; two slim, negative-looking but very well "poised" young ladies, who had evidently been thoroughly trained in the best society manners of our capital, shook hands, smiled upon our heroine, and, in answer to what their father said of a business interview, glided gracefully away into an adjoining room, whence for a few moments came occasionally the sounds of a masculine voice interrupting their chatter, then all was silence; the young people had gone away, it would seem, and Alison, with a frank, earnest glance at Colonel Winstane, began her story.

In the outset she begged him to regard the "ower-strange tale" as strictly confidential, and won him over completely by her frank, sweet way of saying:

"I never could forget you, Colonel Winstane, after that night, and when I was thinking who could tell me just

what to do, and how to do it, your name in the paper as being here seemed like an inspiration."

And then she carefully, slowly, omitting no necessary detail, yet burdening her story with nothing useless, told him all that had happened in connection with her inheritance from the time her grandmother intrusted her with the second will down to the present moment.

And Colonel Winstane, man of the world that he was,—of that geographical Bohemia which has the setting sun for its horizon, the Rockies for its halting-place,—accustomed to the ups and downs of busy political life, listened, wondering first why people went about imagining plots for their trashy story-books, then how in this slender, unobtrusive-looking girl there had been found the qualities of mind and body, heart and nerve, for all she had devised, undertaken, and gone through.

"Upon my word! my dear," said the colonel finally, "this is a most extraordinary story. Of course you have all the—ahem—necessary documents?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! Don't be afraid, I am not indulging in a mere speculation, colonel; my grandmother's last will and testament is in very safe keeping. See, here is a certified copy."

And Alison, after handing him the paper, walked away to the furthest side of the room, where, resting her foot on the fender, she gazed down into the cannel coal fire, thinking intently, anxiously, painfully, yet not without vivid gleams of hope and satisfaction, while the colonel, in profound, motionless silence, read the document she had given him, carefully once, then again.

A long-drawn "Ah-hem!" as he leaned back in his chair made Alison turn with a slight smile to see complete acquiescence and confidence in his expression.

"My dear," he said gravely, and looking up at her fair, calm young face with something peculiarly interested in his whole manner, voice, expression, "if you can prove this will,—and I can't see myself how it is to be disputed,—you ought to be a very rich woman, and I trust a very happy one! And I don't see that there is very much for the lawyers even to do to require their usual slice in such contests. No, your late grandmother evidently knew what she was about, and her own instructions to you, her confiding the will to your keeping—— Oh, yes, it is a very clear case for you, and a pretty bad one for them. But, as you were shrewd enough to suggest, delay now is worse than folly. Those cormorants up there should not be allowed another day."

"What shall I do? Colonel Winstane, I leave it wholly in your hands."

"The first thing is to find this man Robbins. You—you look pretty well tired out, though. Suppose I send someone for you? Where did you say you were stopping?"

Alison gave the address, adding a very dear friend who was with her was not well enough to be left too long.

"Oh, never mind!" returned the colonel, naturally impatient. "That young doctor you speak of surely can do something. Now, then,—pardon me, but it is a question any man would put another for the purpose,—have you need for a banker temporarily? You know this,"—he touched the paper,—“is security for any small matter of the kind, so be perfectly frank."

"You are more than kind!" exclaimed Alison quickly. "And I promise to let you know what I may need. I have a little left still of what Mr. Robbins brought me."

She mentioned the sum, whereupon Colonel Winstane laughed good-naturedly.

"My dear," he said, as he drew his writing-desk toward him and opened it, "I am afraid in business of this kind you will find a little more substantial amount required."

He made out a check rapidly, hesitated, then, leaving the room, saying no doubt bills would be easier for her to manage, returned in a few moments with one hundred dollars in notes of ten each in his hand.

"Purely a business matter; no thanks needed," he said, with his kindly smile. "You may relieve your mind by giving me a receipt," and as Alison did so, the importance of the occasion impelling her to write her full name, the colonel said quickly:

"Morpeth? Where do you get that name, may I ask?"

"It was my father's middle name—his mother's. They were Virginians originally."

"Precisely!" exclaimed the colonel, with kindling eyes. "Ah! it *tells*—good blood! There never was a finer gentleman in the truest sense of the word than old Paul Revere Morpeth as I remember him! Well, well, this is a subject for another day's investigation. Let them laugh at my theories who may," added Colonel Winstane, with a snap of his dark eyes; "*I* get new background for them every day!"

"I have always believed innate refinement, and good early training, must tell," said Alison quickly, "whether one's grandfather were a cobbler or a banker."

"Yes, yes. Well, my dear young lady, will you find Mr. Robbins at once? Have you a suitable escort? My Harry would be delighted to go with you."

But Alison, ashamed of having trespassed so long on the colonel's time, assured him she could be amply provided

form Mrs. Norton's household, promised to go at once in search of Mr. Robbins, thence, according to his advice, to Mr. Powers' office; and with renewed thanks, and an earnest hope that before she left New York she might have the pleasure of meeting all his family, Alison, decidedly invigorated and encouraged, was put into her coupé by the colonel and driven away, her recent host loitering an instant as he was returning to his rooms to indulge in a little quiet speculation on what the future might bring forth.

"Morpeth of Virginia, eh?" mused the colonel. "She's not unlike that witch of a Sallie Morpeth I thought had my young heart in tatters once upon a time."

So he went back to his daughters, who, although *demoiselles bien élevée*, were not without their woman's share of curiosity, to explain that Miss Fane had come to consult him on some important business, and to add that he desired them to "show her every attention; for she's more of a stranger in New York than any of yourselves," he added, lest the hyper-punctilious Rhoda be at all on her dignity, "and just now, for convenience and proper protection, boarding with some friends in humble circumstances."

And the girls, left alone, discussed the matter, very certain from his manner and expression that "pa," as he was called, had his mind made up on the subject, and really, even Miss Rhoda admitted, the girl was very lady-like, and "decidedly too pretty to let Harry see much of her!"

Alison, meanwhile, was being driven rapidly along the bright, sunshiny, wintry streets in the direction of Benton Place, her mind fully enough occupied with the results of this interview to make the minutes fly. How thoroughly had Colonel Winstane fulfilled her idea of him! how

delightful to be once more in touch with people who made up the kind of world she had called her own, and which, with a few notable exceptions, her life of late had known too little.

“And to think,” reflected Alison, “it costs nothing, this graciousness of nature, mind, feeling! Yet it makes the world a charmed place, it sets one’s best faculties to work, it refines, readjusts,—what is the word I want?—*transmutes* all it touches. And how define it? Broderick has it in every fibre of that keenly strung, delicate mechanism of his nature, and yet his hands are brown with toil; and this Colonel Winstane could never have bought it, can never lose it; while such men as Gray Gorman, for instance, might spend millions and never once receive that *baptism* of delicacy and sense of *noblesse oblige*! Well, well, I can’t complain of a humdrum life, anyway, and yet, oh, how I long, under some circumstances, for just the most tranquil, every-day routine, say in dear Miss Homer’s little Half House!”

CHAPTER XLIII.

ALISON found her Benton Place friends all alert and anxious for her return; the very rattle of the coupé was music to their ears; and to our young heroine the honest sympathy, the keen, if rather noisy, interest expressed in welcoming her return, were all pleasant reminders that she had true friends anyway in these good-natured, workaday people, and her little history, so far as it could be revealed to them, had all the glamour of a romance.

And Alison's bright, soft glance as she returned, her evident gay humor, were enough to inspire them all, while her request for a companion to Bramley from among the family party was considered even more encouraging; and, finding that one of the girls was free to accompany her, she begged of her to make ready at once while she took a look at Hilda, who was very well off in the front parlor, which Alison was glad to find considerably changed, and brightened up, since her last visit there. If all went well, as she now believed it would, Hilda need not return to Exeford; her natural protector, her new home, would be waiting for her here; and then our heroine, with a little sigh, wondered whether what she expected as the outcome of all this might not end only in—a dream! But she paused, put aside all such reflections, to despatch a few lines to Broderick, saying little of her business, lest it be seen by other eyes, only encouraging him with word that “all was well,” and she would see him very soon, adding something to amuse and interest him about the Nortons,

also saying in italics: "*I have seen and consulted Colonel Winstane, whom you probably remember, about my business.*" A note to old Janet followed, and by that time the smiling Nora appeared equipped for their journey, evidently full of a sense of importance sufficiently dashed with mystery to make her position both novel and exciting.

It was a short trip to Bramley, where, as she judged, they arrived in about the right time to find Mr. Robbins, and, needless to say, that gentleman gave his visitors a most cordial welcome, while as soon as possible Alison saw him alone and explained the object of her visit.

It was a decided relief to find that the astute little man thoroughly approved her course; quite natural that he should say with his most important manner:

"Ah, my dear young lady, we did well when we sent you up there to look into things! Your late respected grandmother and—ahem!—myself knew just what we were about! But, oh, I say!"—and the decorous little man actually grinned,—“won't there be a row among the rest of them when they find out how things stand! Jiminetty Christmas! why, that Mrs. Parkinson and her daughters have been putting on all kinds of airs lately. You see, you're going to work and getting your little seven hundred and fifty so pat makes 'em dead sure *you* aint in it anywhere, and the only bother *now* is which one of 'em's coming out first in the game! Ho! ho! ho! I wouldn't miss being on hand when the news is made known for—my best terrier pup! No, sir! It 'll be better than a whole Christmas dinner!"

And again, in his silent but thorough way, Mr. John Robbins laughed until tears stood in his eyes, and, as the case appeared to him so peculiarly humorous, Alison felt at liberty to indulge in a smile and twinkle of the eye

for asserting and proving her claim impoverished no one; it would merely save her grandmother's fortune from passing into grasping, miserly hands, and the discomfiture would come from such thoroughly selfish and worldly motives that she could but believe it would be most richly deserved.

"There's only one desperate pity, and that is she—your respected grandmother—aint here to see it," said Mr. Robbins, too thoroughly in earnest to be disrespectful. "For I don't know another as would so thoroughly appreciate the scene. Now, then, when is this little *coup*,"—Mr. Robbins called it *coop*,—"to take place?"

"Colonel Winstane can advise us best," said Alison. "Suppose, Mr. Robbins, you get the will, and meet me at the Everett House to-morrow morning—say 10 A. M.? I will see the colonel in the meantime. By the way, he was good enough to loan me some money."

"Safe enough!" sighed Robbins. "Well, well, so this is the end of the Broderick affair," he added.

"The *end*!" exclaimed Alison quickly. "No, no, Mr. Robbins; only the beginning. Why, I'll be coming to you next for advice as to how to spend my money!"

The good-hearted man eyed her anxiously for a moment, and then said with much solemnity:

"Miss Fane, I'll offer a bit gratis now and here. I'm an oldish man, and my walk in life has lain just along the path of law that sees ups and downs of all kinds. Do you put a *good slice* of the Broderick money away where you can't lay a little finger even on the principal. Do you understand? Put it beyond everyone's reach, for with that big heart of yours you'll never keep it else; and, mind you, in my calling I've seen the sun rise on a millionaire and set on a pauper, one and the same man,

just because he couldn't or wouldn't learn that one simple practical lesson. It's the old story—all your eggs in one basket. One tumble makes the general smash!"

"You couldn't counsel me better," declared Alison. "Believe me, young and soft as I may look, life has held too many bitter experiences for me not to value just what you say at its highest worth. Why, even now, Mr. Robbins, my good fortune may, I fear will, mean financial ruin to many, some I care much for."

Her mind reverted to the Leighs, who she feared had their *all* invested in Gormans.

"Ah, I'm not so sure; for, you see, in routing out all these people who think they own Gorman's you are not dispossessing stockholders. Hadn't thought of that, eh? No, no, it's only the actual ownership that will change hands. Never mind." He hesitated. "I suppose you don't know what the whole thing is worth."

Alison shook her head. "I know," she answered, "Gorman's is only part of it."

"Well——" Mr. Robbins thrust his hands deep into his pockets, leaned back, and with his mouth puckered up went through a bit of mental arithmetic which brought his chair legs down suddenly as he remarked: "I should say—well, your actual money income ought to be somewhere around thirty-eight to forty-two thousand a year; not a cent less, anyway."

"What!" exclaimed Alison. Her face paled, and flushed.

"Then there are some outside investments drawing nothing just now," he continued calmly. "But the way things look now they may turn out worth ten to fifteen more any day."

Alison could not speak for an instant. Robbins was

quite right. She had not possessed the least idea that wealth such as this could be hers. An income sufficient to make every wheel of life run smoothly, to gratify every fine impulse, to make special care of others possible—this she had thought more than likely; but a sum far less than that Mr. Robbins named would have done all this liberally and well. Again came the thought, the dread, how would it affect Broderick? who she well knew could be immovable were he to take any line of action with determination to follow it.

Well, she must shirk no duties such "high estate," as the world would call it, involved, and *if* he would barter what she had to give him,—worth so much more than millions of money,—for foolish pride or prejudice, then the sooner they understood each other the better. No, she would not masquerade longer. He should accept her good fortune in the right spirit or leave her and it together; and at least that sweet, exquisite assurance that he had loved her when he thought her a poor girl seeking to earn her own living must remain. He should, she now determined, see her as her grandmother had meant she should be: a girl of acknowledged social consequence and wealth; and if he thought too poorly of his love to lay it at her feet, then—well, she would take him at his own valuation, give back the unwritten pledge which in his danger his lips, his eyes, the fervent pressure of his hand, all had made, compelling the full surrender of her own heart's secret.

Meanwhile, in the rapid change of look and manner in his young visitor, Robbins saw only the expression of thoughts which the sense of new and unexpected power gave the girl; mistaking the proud gleam in her eyes, the curve of her soft lips, for exultation; and, thoroughly admiring the effect they produced, decided within himself that

without her thousands to "back her up" he'd "start Mrs. Broderick's heiress" anywhere "to win" with them. Well, it would be a race to the strongest, the fleetest, who could capture her. Had he realized that all that lovely varying color, the proud light in her eyes, the exquisite smile, were in reality for the sake of Gorman's "master hand" only, who lay, perhaps a cripple for life, in an humble Exeford lodging, what our good friend's opinion of his client's judgment might be I will not venture to say. However, if our faces are said only to be masks for our feelings, they at least in their expressive moments play us very false, and Mr. Robbins, therefore, saw no reason to alter the "first-class" estimate, to quote his own words, he had made of Alison's good judgment and sound common-sense. They discussed the matter a little further, repeated their arrangement to meet at the Everett House at ten o'clock the next morning, after which Mr. Robbins, forgetting his professional capacity, begged that Alison and her "young friend" would take a "snack" of luncheon and allow him to introduce his wife and son.

Mrs. Robbins, a stout, smiling, elderly lady, very promptly appeared, bustled about, carried in some hot drink, a mixture of "John's own," as she explained, and tasting of raspberry cordial, lemon, and nutmeg very agreeably, spice cake being the "adjunct," while Mr. John Robbins, Jr., quite an "elegant young man," according to Nora's later description when at home, invited the ladies to inspect his special department in the garden, where he exhibited proudly half a dozen very ugly but valuable dogs, and twice as many prize fowl, every one of which had earned recognition at the county fairs, and, with such an agreeable exhibitor, were wonderful creatures in Nora's eyes.

Altogether a friendlier or more satisfactory visit could not have been made. Alison, as they were escorted by the attentive father and son to the station, and there put into the best seats to be found on the train for New York, felt as though the circle of her plan in regard to her grandmother's legacy, if considerably widened, was very nearly spanned; within a short time all must be known—her grandmother's object accomplished, her own part fulfilled. For the future, who could prophesy with any clearness as to the results of what had included so much that was tangled, obscure, perplexing, even tragic? But our heroine felt as though the experiences of half a lifetime had been crowded into the past few months, and there was a relief from so much anxious "thinking" in listening to Nora's artless chatter, promising the girl some pleasant days in the future, and in drawing her out as to the state of affairs at home, which Alison had guessed were not over-prosperous, since Molly's engagement to young Mr. Rokesmith was likely to be indefinitely prolonged, for, although that energetic young man favored a speedy and happy termination to his wooing, Molly thought she "ought not," Nora said, "to leave ma when things were so worrisome."

It appeared that various tenants had been "bad pay," and that Connor hadn't got his promised "rise." It was the old story of a fatherless family struggling in an overcrowded city with no strong specialties to distinguish them in business as a little above the average worker, and Alison, in her sympathy with Nora's anxious little recital, almost forgot prudence in the suggestion she was "working out" whereby her old friends, as well as some new ones, might be satisfactorily aided in their honest efforts to do well in the battle of life. But good news, she reflected, will keep; and she was exceedingly anxious to do or say

nothing which should lower Colonel Winstane's opinion of her good-sense, as well as that "pluck" and *finesse* he had already discovered in her, all of which were part of the best qualities she could display just now—moderation and prudence.

So, while assuring Nora she would take counsel with Molly and the others and see what might be done, she made no definite assertions, delighting her young companion, however, by her suggestion that before she left they should do a little private shopping together, Mrs. Norton's birthday, to occur next week, being the object.

"Oh, Miss Alison," exclaimed Nora, as they were once more in Benton Place, "how I wish you were rich! Wouldn't you just be the one, though, to have money! But," sighed the girl, "that's always the way, aint it?"

CHAPTER XLIV.

"It is all clear as daylight." Colonel Winstane paused, leaned back in his chair, and, dangling the ribbon of his eyeglass, looked at Alison and Mr. Robbins with a peculiar smile as he added: "Except this young lady's part in it. I own I'm non-plussed there."

"But you admit, sir!" said Alison quickly, "my experiment,—I don't know what else to call it,—was a very successful and profitable one?"

"Very; still it was a great risk, and might have involved serious litigation. As it is, I doubt if they will care to make many difficulties. Too many weak places in their armor."

"Just so," put in Mr. Robbins. "I declare, sir, State's prison's too good for some of them."

"And who will manage the works, mills, whatever you call them, for your client?" enquired the colonel.

"I don't doubt she's quite capable of it herself, only her time might be better employed at,—how old did you say?—twenty years of age."

Alison laughed. "Oh, Colonel Winstane," she exclaimed, "as if I would think of such a thing! Particularly with a man like Hugh Broderick——" She stopped rather abruptly, and the colonel said:

"Oh, yes! I remember Mr. Broderick distinctly."

"He was my grandmother's nephew, sir," said Alison quite composedly again. "I have always had an idea that but for me he would have been her heir."

"Well, he isn't!" said the colonel rather testily. "Mr. Robbins, among us all, we must give this young lady some good advice, I'm afraid, or she'll be having too many cooks over her new fire."

"Broderick is just the man, sir," asserted Mr. Robbins, explaining his thorough knowledge of the business, practically and otherwise.

"Yes, Mr. Broderick has just the qualities needed," said the colonel.

"H'm—well, ye-es; what do you say, Miss Fane?"

Alison, who had been absently making little marks with her pencil on a bit of blotting-paper, looked up to answer:

"What? Oh, Mr. Broderick? I have full confidence in him."

"Then, I suppose," said the colonel, "directly certain legal formalities are gone through with here,—Mr. Robbins and I can attend to all that,—you will want to take a run up there?"

"Oh, certainly!" said Alison, her heart giving a little quick flutter at all the visit might mean. "How soon may I start?"

"I should think by day after to-morrow. It won't do to leave them too long as things stand now. My son Harry will be delighted to be your escort. By the way, he knows someone,—I'm not sure who it is,—up that way; a college chum, I think."

"That will be very kind," said Alison, rising to leave. "I must not delay too long." She laughed gayly. "I'm engineering a surprise party; it's for my good friend Mrs. Norton's birthday, to-night, and I have a few commissions to attend to."

"Surprise party, eh? Well, you are a busy little woman. Very well, my dear," said the thoroughly pleased

and well-satisfied colonel. "The girls will leave their cards, anyway. You can't deprive my Rhoda of that satisfaction, and very soon I shall look to welcoming you to the capital. Now, then,"—Alison had murmured her thanks,—“you are content to leave this affair with us?” Alison nodded her head. “I don't think there'll be a day's real trouble over it. Eh, Mr. Robbins?”

“No, sir; Mrs. Broderick was too sharp for that. I can arrange,” he added a trifle pompously, “for anything my young friend, client, may require in the meantime, and she has desired me, sir, to attend to your courtesy—ahem; money, after all, is very important.”

And Mr. Robbins, with a glance in Alison's direction, proceeded, while she withdrew to the window, to return the money advanced, accept the colonel's acknowledgment, after which Alison gave her acknowledgment to the very well satisfied and contented Mr. Robbins.

“You'll find everything will turn out satisfactorily, sir,” said the honest little man, as they were leaving. “But I always approve of business methods between the best of friends. This young lady of course will need a legal adviser, and I am sure her late grandmother's lawyers have done too well all along not to help her the right way now.”

“Certainly, certainly! Well, my dear,” said the colonel, taking Alison's hand in both of his, and gazing down into her rather anxious young face with genuine kindness, which, indeed, the Virginia colonel would have shown her were she penniless and obscure, “I am glad to have had any part in your good fortune, especially in the very first of it; so you must look upon me, upon all of us, as old friends from this out.”

And what wonder that, as Alison, followed by the elated Mr. Robbins, went out into the clear wintry sunshine, there

was—and from no foolish sentimentality—that sensation described as a “lump in the throat,” which kept her silent, with eyes downcast. They made their way to Fourth Avenue and the car which was to take them to those relatives who were already bothered not a little to interpret an intimation Mr. Thomas Parkinson had received that things in the Exeford business were not “all square.”

But Alison rejoiced heartily when it was all over. Some way, in spite of the very striking vulgarity and coarseness of these people, there was very little satisfaction in their discomfiture; rather did it leave her sincerely compassionate for lives whose whole aim and end being money and money-getting were made so miserable by loss of it; and the attempts at first to disdain belief in *such a tale*, then, when Mr. Robbins' forensic and legal talents were brought to bear in such a way as to make doubt impossible, the equal effort to be a little more friendly with the heiress, all alike disheartened Alison from her first intention, which was to be at least friendly and lenient. There could be no benefits exchanged here. None of them was poor; they were utterly out of her reckoning. The Nortons, whom they might, probably would, socially despise, were so in every way immeasurably their superiors that Alison, as she and her indignant companion “shook the dust from their feet” at Mrs. Parkinson's door, rejoiced in having so different an element to expect “at home”—a term poor Alison had too long, I fear, cheated herself into using.

It was over, at all events. There had been no triumph—only one more lesson, perhaps an increase of the kind of pride with which my little heroine was, it may be thought, unduly endowed, and which made her feel how impossible even contamination was from people of the Parkinson

class, who were, so far as she was concerned, as remote from her consideration as creatures in a different planet; to be remembered merely as one of the encumbrances put aside on her way to that life of tranquil, harmonious "self-possession" she sometimes dared to think, to hope, lay in waiting for her.

CHAPTER XLV.

"Now, then, my dear young lady," said the kindly Mr. Robbins, as he bade good-by to her at Mrs. Norton's door, "while of course there is no longer the least doubt as to establishing your perfectly just claim, or in procuring any amount of money you may need, or even desire to spend, yet pray let me once more urge caution upon you. Remember also that by too much lavishness at once you lessen the influence of your power, your money!"

Alison showed her entire appreciation of what was really the very best advice which a whole bench of judges might have given.

"You are a real friend!" she exclaimed. "I know you are right. And, besides that, my good counsellor," she added, with that sweet, half-sad look very often in her young eyes, "I don't want just to *buy* friendship, or care, or anything!"

"Ah, my dear," said the astute little man, shaking his head, "you're right *there*, too! But I hope you have not purchased it every time." He looked at her a trifle anxiously. "There's one friend you couldn't ever buy, and that's Broderick. I'm inclined to think with your money you will lose him."

The girl's face changed color swiftly, but she tried to smile and say lightly:

"Then even on that account he would not be worth keeping! Now, then, Mr. Robbins," she added eagerly, changing the subject, "I want to know how much I may spend to-day. Remember, it has to be a ready-money out-

lay, and if you and your son will only, as you promised, honor us with your presence, I am sure you will see it has been well worth while. Come, now! I positively refuse to do it shabbily!"

"Well, well; its one o'clock now. Can you wait until 2.30? Very well; I'll send you up all I can by a trusty messenger, and you can give me your receipt on account."

It seemed, indeed, to put the seal of certainty on what Alison could not realize as actually her good fortune even yet; and that her first really lavish outlay should be for others, if it justified Colonel Winstane's and Mr. Robbins' caution, equally proved our little heroine's slender thought of self, although no doubt the much smaller sacrifices made by natures of a different mould demand the greater respect and reward, since with temperaments like hers generosity implies no self-denial, rather its reverse causes discomfort and actual pain—a fruitful theme, perhaps, for those who cry down the one and laud the other to bear in mind while they deliver their discourse and announce their plaudits or condemnation to the world at large.

Nora was not long in making ready to accompany Alison on this expedition of secret delight. Mrs. Norton was easily "put off," although Alison took the wise precaution to say that she "expected company to-night, and hoped Mrs. Norton would take a nice rest, as they all wanted a thoroughly good time." Mr. Rokesmith of course had been duly notified,—indeed, Been & Harrison's was to be one of the first places visited,—while Dr. Holton of course had been not only "bidden to the ball," but informed by Alison that a friend or two would be acceptable company as well.

Promptly at 2.30 came Mr. Robbins' messenger, who handed Alison a sealed envelope, desired her to count the bills for one hundred and fifty dollars contained within, and

sign his receipt; which concluded, with a note of thanks to Mr. Robbins, Alison flew away to urge Nora to make haste, to give her little hint of "company" to Mrs. Norton, to see that Hilda was resting thoroughly, and even while she indulged in a pirouette or two of delight around the room to wish,—oh, how much who could say?—she had power to summon her one especially wished-for guest that evening. Never mind! Alison's eyes sparkled as she fastened the velvet strap of her dainty little bonnet under her chin with a pretty filagree pin, and nodded to herself in the glass as she reflected on the bit of sentiment she meant to indulge in. The first of those crisp bank-notes actually representing her income as Mrs. Broderick's heiress was to go in charity, pure and simple, through Dr. Holton's hands; the second Alison meant quite privately, while Nora was engaged elsewhere, to invest in something she could take back as a remembrance to Broderick of this wonderful fairy-like day.

The coupé was again in requisition, the man directed to drive fast, and the name of a fashionable jeweller on Broadway rather startled Nora. When Alison said: "I've a purchase to make for a friend; will you wait for me?" Nora was entirely acquiescent, thoroughly enjoyed herself while she waited, leaning back in the luxurious little carriage, watching the throng of pedestrians passing and repassing on Union Square from the novel position of one who "need not walk a step," as she put it to herself. Then Alison came hurrying out with shining eyes, and gave the next address to the driver, which was to a confectioner's, where she fairly bewildered Nora by the supper ordered "without fail by ten o'clock," the dishes, etc., hired to be sent *at once*! A number of pretty, appropriate German favors were picked out, to be distributed at supper. Then came the purchase of presents, which occupied

delightfully an hour or two in Been & Harrison's with the exultant Molly and ever gallant Mr. Rokesmith in attendance. Not shy was he of displaying his fine friends to the others in Messrs. Been & Harrison's employ. By no means! Molly's "young man," as Nora called him, escorted them from counter to counter with the air of one scion of royalty entertaining another, and if there *had* been anything needed to increase Nora's respect for Molly's *fiancé*, it was the careless elegance, the superb self-possession, with which he conducted himself on this occasion. There was no trifling, I assure you, with Mr. Rokesmith, no impertinence in the eye of the small cash-girl to overlook! He strolled about in the way of one long accustomed to rule, and, if necessary, to conquer and subdue, and Alison, thoroughly appreciating the entire situation, on her side enjoyed aiding and abetting his design, asking his advice on every question with such a pretty look of anxiety and demand for knowledge that more than one fellow-clerk wondered what was "on" with "Billy" that he had such a swell customer as evidently one of his particular friends. And Billy of course had more than once to assure the young ladies he "would not be late that evening," returning from seeing them into their coupé, with a slightly haughty smile, but quite ready to explain to a friend or two that it was "only his friend Miss Fane." He had been promising to attend a surprise party she was giving to Miss Norton's people, that was—ahem—all."

Useful as well as ornamental were the purchases made under Nora's direction, and the little coupé was so well laden that Alison suggested Nora's driving back with the collection, while she remained half an hour or so with a friend she had decided also to see the same day—no other than the Bessie Harriman of Mrs. Mordaunt's tale!

CHAPTER XLVI.

ALISON hesitated a moment on entering the vestibule of the apartment house to which she had been directed, as there was no card over any bell with the name of Harriman, but an elderly woman who appeared in the basement window told her to ring top floor back, "I guess they aint moved or I'd a-known it," she added, and accordingly Alison, having done so, waited a moment only; the door opened slowly, and she went into a narrow hall with a staircase uncarpeted, but ornamented by an elaborate balustrade, ahead of her, up four flights of which she slowly toiled.

At the upper landing, in the semi-darkness, she discerned a girlish figure, a thin face lighted by brilliant blue eyes and a pretty smile; a voice, sweet, quick, and clear, yet in some way not unlike the ease-loving Tasia's, said: "Is it for Mr. Harriman? The new card isn't on yet, and I forgot to write up the name." And then Alison, saying pleasantly: "Am I speaking to Mrs. Harriman? I am Alison Fane from Exeford," followed her hostess into the tiniest hall, thence into a very small sitting-room, which the centre table, small sofa, and one arm-chair almost seemed to crowd, although there were other, evidently home-made, pieces of furniture: boxes covered with chintz,—the usual contrivances of the modern flat when in miniature proportions,—and withal a very pretty look of homeliness about everything which more than made up for lack of elegance or style, while everything was scrupu-

lously neat and clean. Alison in the momentary pause could not but remember that day long ago when Tasia, reclining in the deep easy chair of her room at Braune House, had told her "poor Bessie's" story, and it was certainly hard to reconcile the lively widow's picture of an overworked young wife in a miserable house with what was before her eyes, although the Bessie Harriman of real life certainly looked overanxious and rather careworn.

"Is there any—trouble up there?" said Mrs. Harriman, when she and her visitor were seated. "I haven't heard from Tase in a long time."

"I—there is—there *may* be some business trouble," said Alison, a trifle confused; but, leaning her elbow on the arm of the chair in which she sat, her cheek on her hand, she looked anxiously at the face of "poor Dick Harriman's" wife, wondering just how to say what was on her mind. To suggest that Tasia was a thorn in poor Agnes' side would not now, she hoped, be necessary, and yet—she could not feel all was safe just yet, and—— But to her surprise the girl before her suddenly cut the knot with a simple question:

"Has Tasia been doing anything more to worry Agnes Leigh? What a goose Jack is! Why, Tase only likes to show her power. Don't be horrified, Miss Fane. Dick and I are only old-fashioned people. You think it 'll be all right? Well, I hope so. I wrote Tase a pretty sharp letter the other day. I guess I said a word or two'll bring her to her senses. Grandma Willetts' been enquiring pretty closely into things, as I told her."

And then, relieved on this score, Alison made haste to say she had called for a very different purpose, and accordingly explained that a very dear friend of hers who was something of an invalid was about to be married to a

rising young physician, and there was an idea of joining forces with another couple in housekeeping. They had been so good to her the only substantial way in which she could return it was to help make some such arrangement—— Her main idea was at last made clear. Suppose, if they could arrange with the doctor and Hilda to begin housekeeping on a larger scale in a neighborhood where he had his best practice——

Bessie's face glowed, her eyes were filled with a soft look of happiness, as she listened, and then, standing up, she said a little shyly: "P'r'aps, Miss Fane, you wouldn't mind my bringing Dick in? Of course I'd have to talk it over with *him*! He's—well, just now he isn't busy. My little girl's been sick, too," she added, with a little cough. "Things do come together somehow, but the baby can't bear to be a minute out of Dick's sight."

And the girlish young creature, who looked little more than a child herself for all that clear, bright, resolute way of hers, disappeared into the rear of the small flat, returning presently followed by a tall, broad-shouldered, remarkably good-looking, but very boyish, young fellow of perhaps twenty-three or four, a thorough gentleman, however, in spite of his wofully shabby attire, and the fact, as he unhesitatingly announced, that he had just been "coaxing the kitchen fire." He carried a very tiny, delicate, but pretty, little creature perhaps eighteen months old on his arm, and saying, with a laugh: "Our eldest, Miss Fane," sat down and gave his full attention to the plan Alison had to unfold.

Our heroine saw at once, without seeming to observe it, the flash of pleasure in the quick glance exchanged between the husband and wife, and presently Mrs. Harri-man stood up, saying: "Let me take baby in the next

room, dear, and you and Miss Fane can talk business better." Young Harriman promptly agreed to this, and when his wife and "the eldest" had disappeared, though the sound of Bessie's voice singing gayly to the little one came from the furthest room beyond, nothing interrupted a clearly business talk in which the young man promptly explained to her he had not been doing well for months. His marriage had annoyed everyone, then his partner had failed; the little one had always been delicate, and Bessie was not strong. All through the story, however, he had referred to his "patents," and in summing up he assured her he was hopeful, as it only needed a little capital to set the whole thing afloat, and he eagerly explained and showed off various of his contrivances in the room. What had appeared to be an ottoman by a dexterous manipulation unfolded and rose up into bookshelves. A bracket on the wall unrolled in turn a map of the State, the Lord's Prayer, and a list of the heads of departments in Washington. A plaster cast on a small stand, apparently setting forth the features of the Father of his Country, came apart miraculously, to go together again as Grover Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison, the pedestal of clay being with one turn transformed into the familiar patriarchal hat!

Alison, like many another, gazed, amused, surprised, lost in wonder, as to why such wonderful inventive genius had not long ago made, instead of marred, young Harriman's fortunes, for he frankly admitted he had given up more than one business offer to "stick to his last model."

"I'm getting downhearted now, though," the poor young fellow added, as, with his hands in his pockets, he gazed ruefully on the plaster cast he had just returned to its original outline. "Since I've seen Bessie,—God bless

her! the best wife a fellow ever had, Miss Fane,—suffering so, and the poor little one—— Well, to be frank with you, I've walked my feet sore lately trying to get the right thing to do! You see, I was laid up myself for some weeks, and—well, well, it all came together! But I heard lately old Mrs. Willetts' been asking for us, but I'll never let Bess hold out the first hand *there*—no, no!”

Alison listened, deeply interested, touched, anxious to serve in the best way possible.

“But, Mr. Harriman,” she said eagerly, “with your wife's abilities as a housekeeper, your mechanical skill, why would not just for the present my plan be a good one? Why can't you help me to make money out of it? My idea is this: If you and Dr. Holton will join forces with the Rokesmiths in some large enough place to let out other rooms, *I'll* be your only debtor. There's a piece of property I've long wanted to rechristen: its associations are sad; the house is, I'm told, tumbling down for want of tenants and repair. My grandmother, who had peculiar ideas, lived there; it's a good neighborhood for business purposes, I am sure, for I enquired of a business man to-day, Mr. Robbins, and he called it tip-top.”

The young fellow's eyes gleamed with pleasure.

“Have you spoken to Bess yet?” he asked quickly. “Why, that *sounds* capital! How'd you come to think of it?”

And a quarter of an hour later, young Harriman having brought Bessie back to the council, remarking with an air of relief the “kid” was asleep, the discussion became eager, earnest, and enthusiastic. With the elasticity of temperament belonging to his type, poor Dick saw at once limitless possibilities in the scheme suggested, and Alison at last rose to go, only after promising to go with them

the next day and inspect the late Mrs. Broderick's dwelling.

"Couldn't you manage to come up this evening?" she added in leaving, explaining the nature of the party and the absolute lack of ceremony there would be on such an occasion. "You would meet them all then. Couldn't someone take care of the baby?"

They were at the staircase now, young Harriman's hand resting on his wife's shoulder. Alison from the step below looked up, wondering how often they "went over" to each other the night of the famous Vandorn ball. Did they, *could* they, regret it? She fancied not. And in the lives she had seen where all was abundance, opulence, distinction, were there not cares enough of another kind to dim the eye, pale the cheek, weaken the footstep? And here eye and step were cheered because the wondrous magician's wand had touched, transformed, the sordid, the commonplace; heart to heart, they could afford their bravery!

"Why, yes, Bessie," said Harriman, looking down at his wife; "you can manage that! It 'll do you lots of good. Thank you, Miss Fane. You're an angel in disguise. My wife's been such a little home body so long she's actually afraid of anyone else's door-way."

"Then you'll come? How delightful!" said Alison with a smile. "I declare, I ought to be very happy. I'm getting all my best wishes."

But as she hurried away, feeling worried somewhat at the lateness of the hour in view of the surprise party, a little sigh half unconsciously escaped her lips.

It was really very late, considering all that was to be done, and that no doubt the girls in Benton Place were nearly distracted now if the things ordered for the supper

had actually begun to arrive in her absence, and Alison fairly flew along the pavement, reaching what for want of another word she called "home," to be met by Nora and Molly, and even the dignified Connor, all three full of excitement as they begged her to come down and see what "the man" had been bringing in.

"Guess it will be a regular party, and no mistake," observed Connor, with a chuckle of glee, adding that all their hastily invited guests were "dead sure" to come. The limit had been fixed at a dozen couples.

And meanwhile, in the little sky parlor Alison had quitted, Bessie Harriman was on her knees, her pretty head bent against her husband's arm as he sat in their one easy chair, crying as if her very heart would break, and Dick, poor fellow, not without a struggle, was trying to laugh away her tears, saying suddenly:

"What do you suppose she would have thought if she knew, Bessie, old girl, we'd just been wondering whether we could best do without supper to-night or breakfast to-morrow morning?"

And as Bessie, with an hysterical little laugh, looked up to say: "*O Dick! think of it!*" the baby gave an uneasy little moan, and Bessie darted away, returning in about five minutes, pale to her lips.

"See here, Dick Harriman," she said gravely; "and only yesterday you quarrelled with me about Heaven."

Tucked away inside of the little blue and white check gown of the baby Bessie had found Alison's handkerchief tied tightly around a bit of paper on which "For the new house" was written, and inside of that was a crisp twenty-dollar bill.

If Colonel Winstane and Mr. Robbins had been in the main quite right in their advice, I think their really wise

precautions would not have included this little thank-offering, as Alison called it, had they seen the look the young husband and wife exchanged in that moment when Dick took her silently into his arms and kissed her gently.

"Bess," he said rather huskily, "I *ought* to be a better fellow. I mean to work at *anything* to—to change all this, and, by George, I *will*! That girl's coming has turned everything about, somehow. God in heaven bless her!"

"Yes," whispered Bessie.

"Well, what next?" said Dick, looking down at the pale little face.

"We can get some dinner," exclaimed Bessie, "from the restaurant. Right away, Dick!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

THERE having been no idea of any such festivity in the minds of either Hilda or Alison on their coming to New York, it required some consideration and a slight expenditure to create suitable toilets for the occasion, but Alison's bronze-colored silk was very becoming, especially with some soft yellowish lace at neck and sleeves, and a bunch of rich damask roses in her belt, and Hilda's pale loveliness, scarcely to be called beauty, and yet striking and distinguished at all times, was set off by her gown of trailing black silk, black net at her throat and brought down to the waist in scarf-like fashion, where a great cluster of rich red geraniums with their green foliage caught it effectively. Her fairness, the heavy coils of golden hair, the deep tone of her eyes, all were set off by this sombre but rich dress, and as she moved with a languid sort of grace across the room Alison could not help thinking her quite charming enough to have pleased any one.

The Nortons were out in their best gala attire, which meant that fine colors, the newest style in cheap jewelry, the most "regardless" of coiffures, held the day; but their cheery, breezy enjoyment of the occasion was too delightful and genuine to make Alison a bit critical of form and color in such matters, and, as she wisely reflected, since they were pleased, what mattered it whether those "superfine feelings" of hers, as Broderick had once characterized them, were a bit jarred? It was all to be a genuine merry-making, a pleasant, good-humored, *home-like* evening; and

as Alison gave the last touches to the parlor, given over to the company, of course, for this occasion, and ran downstairs for a look at the supper-table, she was in excellent spirits, and on good enough terms with herself and the world in general to almost forget the shadows of the past, and the dread she had of some bitter awakening. As she neared the dining-room something like a little sob struck her ear, and there in the gloom of the hall was Mrs. Norton, still in her calico wrapper, her hair very much rumpled, while a voice just behind her, which proved to be Molly's, was heard saying: "All right, ma. Here's Miss Fane herself," and it ensued that Alison's gifts, just opened in her bedroom, had been "too much for her," as she expressed it.

The girls had chosen well; a black silk dress pattern, beaded trimmings, etc., made Mrs. Norton proudly happy, while the smaller articles were each and every one suitable and useful. There was a gift from each one of her household, and poor Mrs. Norton hardly knew whether to laugh or cry as she was hustled away to bathe her eyes and make herself ready for the party.

Nearly everyone had arrived when the door opened upon Mr. and Mrs. Harriman, and Alison, moving quickly forward to greet them, could not but observe the contrast their quiet, unobtrusive appearance offered to some of the gayly happy company assembled; but it pleased her, all the more since she had determined, so far as she was concerned, they should be friends. Bessie, in a very simple light summer silk, looked dignified, pretty, and a thorough little lady, and her tall, handsome young husband was as evidently a gentleman in the best acceptation of the term; and if his mind did occasionally wander to his latest invention, he was full of good-humored appreciation of all

that the scene before them involved and demanded, and very soon was the centre of a laughing, merry group listening to one of the irresistible Billy's funny stories.

"I asked a neighbor to look after baby," whispered Bessie. "How bright and cheery it all is here! Oh, Miss Fane——" she whispered, but Alison, foreseeing what was coming, hurried away to bring up a forlorn-looking young man, one of Rokesmith's friends, who was apparently quite a stranger.

On her way back she paused, as the door opened upon the Robbinses, father and son, who came in with an air of beaming satisfaction, and were promptly seized upon by Nora, to be introduced to the family, and Alison, content that it should be so, slipped away to an unoccupied end of the room to sit down a moment and think out what she would do, say, hear, expect to find, in Exeford.

At this moment the figure of the one hired girl of the establishment appeared, coming up the kitchen staircase, a view of which Alison commanded through the side door near which she sat.

It was evident at once that *she* was the object of Hannah's journey into this region, and, wondering what had gone wrong with the supper-table, Alison moved quickly forward.

"He's downstairs, mem," said the girl, with a hand on her palpitating heart, "and says he *must* see you if it's only for one *minute*!"

"He—who?" said Alison, vaguely alarmed, but taking the bit of paper Hannah offered her quickly, she read under the hall light in roughly scrawled characters the following:

"I must see you for a moment alone.

"GRAY GORMAN."

"Downstairs, did you say?" said Alison, mastering her feelings with a decided effort. No one was observing her. Mrs. Norton had been playfully, laughingly, made to sit down to the old piano, where with a crowd about her she was singing "By the margin of fair Zurich's waters."

Hannah, still short of breath, nodded.

"He's in the little room back of the dining-room, miss, the kind of a sewing-room, you know," she said affably, not thinking it worth while to mention the dollar Gorman had given her for the chance to see Alison there a few moments alone.

"Very well." Alison put her hand to her head, deliberated but an instant longer, and then went down the narrow little staircase, slowly, wonderingly, entering the small room mentioned with a curious dazed, yet resolute, manner. Bad news of *some* kind was what she expected, and her first glance at Gray Gorman's face as he stood, leaning one arm on the mantel, his eyes furtively, eagerly, watching the open door, did not tend to set her fears at rest. Rather did something in the young man's look and manner, and his very voice as in a low tone he spoke her name, confirm them.

But, the mechanical greeting exchanged, she stood very still, and, looking at him intently, waited for him to speak.

"You weren't expecting me, of course," he said in a queer, constrained voice, "Miss Fane." He lifted his head suddenly, as though determination of some kind had come to him, and looked at the young girl before him with certainly all that he had of heart in his eyes. "I'm here," he said in a low, choked voice, "just at your mercy! I might have gone off,—no one needed to have been the wiser,—for I've got mixed up in a queer business, and—I guess this'll be the last you'll see of me for a good while to come."

Alison had mechanically seated herself. There was no doubt now that Gorman was terribly in earnest, and he flung himself into a chair by the table, pressing his head with his hands for a moment, and then, wheeling about, went on in a hard, dry voice:

"I don't need to blame anybody, only there always is a woman in everybody's trouble. Never mind; I'm here to ask a favor." He smiled contemptuously. "No, I'll tell you just how down on my luck I am. I'm ready to tell you all the story of that—smash-up—with Broderick that night for the sake of getting away quietly to—well, I suppose, begin again!"

"Stop!" exclaimed Alison suddenly, and standing up over her unbidden visitor, realizing of how deep importance to more than herself this interview might be. "Mr. Gorman, listen to me! I cannot, will not, *buy* any of your wretched secrets, but this I will do. Clear Broderick fully and completely you must and shall, and that in writing! My legal adviser happens to be upstairs now. He will settle it all at once, and in the event of your doing it thoroughly to his satisfaction, and unless there is crime to answer for——" The girl paused, terrified lest she was doing something cruel to the poor creature before her, yet not knowing what was really right in the matter.

"I'm no *criminal*," said the young man sullenly. "Except in giving Broderick,—quite unintentionally, as I'm sure he'll tell you,—that knock down in the dark——"

"*Oh!*" exclaimed Alison. "Did *you* hurt him?" She recoiled in physical horror.

"It was all an accident," exclaimed the young man quickly. "Broderick came upon me in his room while I was looking at that new plant of his. Some of the boys had threatened to smash it, and were coming for that pur-

pose, too, I understand. Well, it's no matter what he thought I *was* doing; I turned and struck; we had a fight of a minute or two. The fellows had been there threatening him and the whole concern. Broderick had been laying for them a good while. I never knew quite how he got the worst of it."

As Gorman paused Alison for an instant closed her eyes, remembering all the chill horror of that night, so short a time ago—the confusion, the arrests, the agony of mind lest it had been Broderick's death-blow some hand had struck!

"I *vow* I never struck him! Ned Stamer was there in the same minute," Gorman went on. "I couldn't have told you five minutes later *how* it happened."

"No matter." Alison spoke in a low, strained tone. She turned away, there was an instant's silence, broken only by the sounds of light-hearted merry-making from above, then, suddenly lifting her eyes with new fire in them, she said in a quick but deliberate voice:

"What you *intended* or wished or *anything* is of no earthly consequence to me now, Mr. Gorman. I was too lenient with you before when I did not make my position known. Now, simply for the sake of others,—the men wrongly accused, poor fellows, your mother, perhaps—well, it may be just to help you yourself a very little to put your feet in an honest path again,—I'll make one more bargain with you. This time, however, the terms shall be all of my own choosing, and when I tell you," added the girl, "I have already asserted and proven my claim to my grandmother's estate, you will see how worse than foolish any opposition will be."

His dulled eyes had lighted with a queer gleam as she spoke; baffled pride, anger, disgust at the turn things had

taken, deprived his face of every attribute which had made it pass current in Exeford and Exetown as handsome—only the weakness, the cunning, the half-veiled insolence, remained; and had Agnes Leigh seen him that moment I am inclined to think her contempt for the whole affair into which she had been drawn by Gray Gorman would have been the last strong sentiment with which the man ever would inspire her.

“Well?” He spoke shortly, nervously, the fingers of his right hand moving restlessly.

“A friend of mine who is upstairs, a legal gentleman who has all my confidence, and who can best arrange this matter for me, will come down if I send word,” Alison went on. “He will keep any secret as long as I wish him to, but he will see the best interests cared for.”

It had come to this, evidently, with Gray Gorman: that if he could drift away out of sight and have something of a “starter,” he did not care on what terms the result was accomplished, nor how lowering it was to that manly pride so long his boast. And, once he had shown his true colors, he was mainly anxious to end the conference, know just what she would “do *for* him,” not “*with* him,” and get away. He had not thought it worth while to admit that he had discovered that Broderick knew precisely what had transpired and was once more on his feet again.

Alison left him alone only long enough to send Hannah with a request to see Mr. Robbins alone downstairs for a moment.

“Be sure no one else sees you, Hannah,” Alison had whispered, and Hannah, who by this time was ready to accept the whole spirit of the evening in the nature of a surprise party, sped away, returning in a moment with the ever kindly but certainly mystified Mr. Robbins.

Half an hour later, having contrived a suitable excuse, Mr. Robbins and the unbidden guest from Exeford made ready to depart together, the legal gentleman assuring Alison it would be all right, he'd see to it that "it was put in writing, and then—well, a ticket to anywhere the gentleman liked could be bought for him."

"I think," said Gorman by way of good-by, "you'll not be sorry to take one message for me, Miss Fane, and maybe it 'll help you not to regret your kindness to-night. Tell Agnes for me I married little Alice Shelton this morning. If this gentleman will, as he says, come to the rooms I've taken, he'll find my wife there to prove it."

"Alice Shelton!" Alison spoke in profound surprise. "The young girl in the marking-room?"

"Yes," said the one-time hero and Adonis of the mills. "There's *some* pluck about me, you see! I wonder how mother and the girls will take it?" he added, with a queer laugh.

"Never mind!" exclaimed Alison. "Only, Mr. Gorman, whatever anyone thinks, remember now *she*, poor child, has only *you* to care for her, and be good to her!"

And a moment later Alison was surprised actually to find herself shaking her enemy's hand, her main thought being a hope that the young life so—hardly, it seemed—linked with his should not suffer from the weakness which, alas! she felt but too surely formed the foundation of the man's vacillating, shallow nature; but it softened her own cause for hard feeling, and she was glad that resentment had taken no more active expression than the contemptuous pity for Gorman which she felt as she let him vanish out of her life. And, after all, as she argued, such characters, creating their own misery, create equally their own punishment as its reward.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

ALISON would have been considerably puzzled had anyone insisted a day later on knowing just how the remainder of that remarkable evening passed, and yet that it was all "merry as a marriage bell" the very sounds, the voices and laughter of one and all, proclaimed, and Dr. Holton almost relaxed his vigilant watch upon Hilda, seeing how thoroughly the young girl was enjoying everything, while he and the Harrimans had the most satisfactory talk possible, upon which Alison put in a word now and then, in regard to the new enterprise, a final result being an arrangement to inspect the property Alison was so anxious to rent on her own terms as soon as possible.

These terms, it appeared, she had decided upon, and she informed her clients that they were to be "taken or left," just as she liked. She was to put the whole place into fit condition; everything but the bare walls, it seemed, was to be done away with, apartments for three or four families built according to the most approved plan for housekeeping; and with two tenants "ready-made," as Alison gayly asserted, it was a very good venture. No rents were to be paid the first year in consideration of a room being reserved for her use, and their undertaking to let out the rest, or at least to act jointly as janitors, except for actual work, an excellent "person" having been found to attend to that, while Alison furthermore hinted that no doubt the prospective Mrs. Rokesmith would be the first tenant to

apply. And could the gloomy—to her mind unlucky—piece of property be put to a better use? With new life, new hopes, ambitions, honest young energies, at work within those once gloomy walls, surely, thought Alison as, the merry, happy conference over, they rejoined the gayer guests, a new blessing would descend upon it, and she decided that they must choose for the little apartment house some peculiarly appropriate and inspiring name, so that it should mean good cheer to them all. As the last good-nights were spoken, when she and the tired, but quietly happy, Hilda were once more alone together, Alison realized to a certain extent how, in letting the stream of one's life flow in many channels for the good, the happiness, of those around one, our own heart sadness may be hidden—never, it is true, forgotten, yet overlain with the only surely mitigating, healing, restoring power: that which comes from a mind and spirit active in the employment of all God-given faculties for the best, whether it be for those around one or for self, that one's own uplifting and increase of power may react for the general impetus onward, the general peace and plenty and good-will.

How happy one and all had seemed to-night! What trifles had made up the really large sum total of innocent mirth and enjoyment! How witty, clever, elegant, they had all considered young Mr. Robbins! How very odd that he should have chosen to sing "Nora Creina"; how all his little witticisms,—he and Mr. Rokesmith had formed a quick partnership as "merry-andrews,"—had been applauded! How Molly had beamed and blushed, and declared she couldn't laugh another bit or she'd just simply *expire* this very minute; and how *awfully* funny it was of Mr. Rokesmith to call out: "Doctor, doctor—haven't we a physician among us? Here is a dangerous

patient, sir!" and how everyone, as Molly said, "just *howled*" because Dr. Holton said sternly: "I think, sir, this young lady requires a trip to Coney Island or some other prominent inland resort"; and then "that Billy Roke-smith," as he was often described, called out: "All aboard for Manhattan Beach and intermediate stations"; and "*ma*" had said such goings on she never *did* see, and those boys would just be the death of her! Whereupon the Argus eye of Billy was turned in her direction as he exclaimed: "Gentlemen, give this lady fresh air, if you please, and let me take her ticket. The doctor will take her temperature and any small change she may have about her."

All of these remnants of the evening's innocent, if rather foolish, fun came back to Alison in the stillness of the night, marking the evening as such a simply happy one that Gorman's visit and all it revealed seemed at moments a wild dream, a sensational impossibility. But it was only too true. The morning, with the unflinching power of daylight, showed her what lay ahead of her even in the actual present, for the first mail brought a line from the active Mr. Robbins, which ran as follows:

"I have arranged that little affair all right, but think you'd better be ready to start at once for Exeford. Of course Mr. Harry Winstane will accompany you. I will call about 10 A. M.

"Respectfully, etc.,

"JOHN ROBBINS."

Alison, who had ordered her own and Hilda's breakfast sent in from a neighboring restaurant, wondered as she drank her coffee and ministered to her friend's simple wants how the "little affair" had been managed, and also

how and where Mr. Robbins had found the poor little bride, Alice Shelton, whom she remembered as a very pretty, simple-looking little creature, not more than seventeen, to whom, no doubt, Gray Gorman had appeared as a perfect prince among men, and now as easily posed as a "hero."

She had told Hilda in a general way that things were in a "queer state" up at Exeford, that it would be necessary for her to take possession speedily, and Hilda was too thoroughly imbued with the prevailing idea that Alison's life was a charmed one to have anything really surprise her connected with it, and, moreover, she had too much reason for deep, quiet content in the way her own affairs were being adjusted to be more than very grateful,—how much she could not half express,—and completely happy.

The neighboring clock had scarcely finished the last stroke of ten, and the parlor, after last night's revel, resumed its former appearance of rather angular uniformity and good order, when the sleepy Hannah ushered in Mr. Robbins, and that worthy's face was a study as he appeared, last night's adventure, as he was certainly at liberty to call it, marking one more chapter in what he always called the *Broderick account*.

"Well, Mr. Robbins," said Alison with a smile, "when you long ago offered me your services, I am afraid you little thought of all they would involve. Why, I'm not sure but that I'll be asking you some of these days to open a special office for me and my friends."

"Nothing more likely, my dear young lady!" exclaimed Mr. Robbins, with a very serious shake of his head, as he took the chair offered him, and very carefully laid down his silk hat. "Well, now to this last affair. I conducted the—gentleman to his room, over on the west side,—an

ordinary lodging, up three flights, double back room,—and it was quite true: there was a mere child, a frightened-looking little thing, who burst right out crying 'cause she thought he'd been killed or run over!"

"Poor little Alice! What a fate!"

"Well, he spoke very soft,—I don't take stock in that sort of thing; like as not he'll be tired of her in a week,—told her to go down to the landlady's room while we talked business, and then, Miss Fane, I tackled to it! Got it all down to a fine point: it clears those poor rascals up there; and really I don't believe he meant to hurt Broderick, but he *was*, sure as fate, fooling around his desk and drawers, looking up his designs or what-you-call-'ems for the machine Broderick was working out, and Heaven knows just what else he'd meant to do; for the man's worse than a cad—he's a sneak!"

"And you have his full and free acknowledgment and all that is needed to free the men from blame, and entirely clear Mr. Broderick from any, the very least, suspicion of complicity?"

"Safe as a church!" declared Robbins, and he produced with the most judicial manner a two-page document to the full effect desired, and signed by Gorman in his boldest characters.

Alison smiled. "And the little wife? She need not know it?"

"Not a word! She'll find him out soon enough! Poor girl! *What* an outlook! Where will love be when she finds she's married such a swindler? Well, well! I'll do as I suppose you wish me to: buy tickets for Chicago to start to-night. I own I begrudge another cent, but I understand on the girl's account they are not to go empty-handed."

"Quite right. I'm very glad——"

"Well, I got a chance when my gentleman went out after a paper to slip a little something into her hand, and I gave her my address, and said of course it was all from you, and I knew you'd like to hear how she got along."

"Oh, Mr. Robbins, you managed beautifully!" exclaimed Alison. "We must open that little private bureau of ours very soon!"

"Just so! Well, I guessed what you'd be likely to want done, and I'm glad it meets your views. Now, then, I've agreed to be ready to buy their tickets and see them off for the great city of the West. My! what a showing up there would be out there if the last trump sounded unexpectedly and all names called! We're a wonderful people!"

Alison smiled. "I don't know yet, as I'm not in formal possession of anything, how all this is to be managed," she said. "But of course the firm understands it all, as you say, so I'll leave it to you. If it were not for having arranged to start for Exeford, I'd go and see them off myself on that poor child's account. But you must say all sorts of kind things for me, and—stay, can't you take a note from me? I'll beg of her to write to me herself just how things are going on. That may be of some use, even as a check upon her husband, for, somehow, I *cannot* yet trust the man even to be true and kind to her."

"You can't, of course! That's a nice thought, my dear—ahem—Miss Fane," said the sympathetic little man, whom years of the "law" had not yet deprived of the milk of human kindness, rather seemed to make its flow a richer one, since so much misery was daily brought to light; and, while Alison hurriedly wrote a few lines of best meaning

to Gorman's poor little unsophisticated bride, Mr. Robbins walked about the room with his hands behind him.

"Now, then, Mr. Robbins, I suppose you can tell me how much money will be needed, how to get it—in short, all about this, our last business transaction for to-day at least."

And in the rapid business talk which followed this point was settled, and once more Alison felt that so much was added to the "credit side" of the Broderick wrong, one more stain of disease wiped away, while she prepared with a lighter heart for the all-important journey to Exeford, Mr. Winstane having sent word he would call for her in full time for the 1.15 express. Meanwhile a note of sympathetic reassurance was despatched to the Harrimans.

It was a relief,—how great she had not anticipated,—to be at last on the cars, to which the very cheery, good-looking, versatile young Virginian had escorted her, to be in as comfortable seats as the parlor car could provide and find Mr. Harry Winstane capital company, greatly interested to hear all she had to tell him of the family of his old college chum Guy Egerton, to whom he said he had despatched a line, stating that he might visit the old manufacturing town. Hilda had clung a little nervously to Alison on leaving, but her assurance of a speedy return was very prompt, and the Nortons were eager in their attentions, and Dr. Holton sure to overlook nothing which could add to her comfort and daily amusement. Could it be, Alison was thinking, as once more she bade her Benton Place friends farewell, that not a year had elapsed since that morning in the old square when she had sat long and anxiously counting up her resources, her acquirements, reckoning as to how long her slender capital would hold out, and wondering what she could expect from her vision-

ary, unknown grandmother, to whom she had made that perfectly natural, but perfectly unprecedented, perhaps she might consider unwarranted, appeal? And here she was, after a series of incidents out of which she fancied a novelist might weave a very passable plot, going to a town she had then known of only by name to claim an independent fortune. How grateful was our little heroine I can scarcely say in that from first to last she had always tried cheerfully and humbly to say God's ways were his own of leading, her duty only to follow that leading, and to hold her tangled skein with patient fingers see it slowly unwound, and its further usefulness made clear.

There was much to do, much to think of; and how all this might or would affect Agnes and her husband she could not but wonder, not a little of her anxiety being to see how things had fared these days in the sombre old Braune House.

CHAPTER XLIX.

ALISON had telegraphed both to Dr. Egerton and Jack Leigh to meet her at the station, and as the train pushed into the familiar mountain-girthed old town Alison caught sight of the doctor's wide-brimmed hat and young Leigh's broad shoulders and keen, handsome face in the usual crowd of people hanging about the station; a moment more and she was shaking hands, introducing her friend Mr. Winstane, who had come up on "pleasure and business combined"; the doctor was regretting Guy's absence, but declaring "his Kate" should try and atone for it; then, while the doctor bore the young Virginian away to his carriage, and Alison was preparing to go to Bend Lane with Mr. Leigh, arrangements were made for a general *rendezvous* later in the doctor's house, Mr. Winstane of course understanding that so far as business was concerned he was to say nothing until Alison gave the cue, and the indefatigable Robbins was to arrive with every credential later in the evening.

"How is Agnes?" was Alison's first question as she and her companion turned down the well-known little woody path toward her humble, but in her eyes happy, little home.

"Better, really brighter and stronger than I have ever known her," said Leigh, with a look of genuine pleasure on his handsome face. "She is in good spirits—most of the time," he added, "and more than impatient to see you. Did you—have you heard of Gorman's flight?" he added.

Alison murmured a constrained "Yes," then went on: "Had he become involved in *much* trouble?"

"Well, it appears things had not been on the square for quite a little time, but it's been a terrible blow to the old man. It's completely crushed him! The whole family, indeed, seem in a state of mental collapse over it. They had always held their heads so high. Now there's a rumor from somewhere that there's more bad news coming. It can't be anything to hurt the mills that I can see, for they were never in a more flourishing condition. It was just this, no doubt, which made Gray Gorman think it easy to fool around with the books. Everything was too prosperous to be very strictly guarded. Oh, yes, the directors anticipate a fine year."

Alison, without daring to lift her eyes, said quietly:

"And the men thrown out of work that miserable night?" She was leading up to other questions, and when Jack said carelessly: "Oh, well, of course they're not all on yet, but they're looked after," she contrived to say composedly: "And Mr. Broderick—is *he* quite well again?"

"Broderick!" Jack's eyes lighted with a curious gleam as he answered. "No, and yes; he is awfully thin and worn-looking, of course, but he's on his feet, with his arm in a sling, most of the time. He's the uneasiest chap! I don't know what, but something's working in his mind. I've a notion, when all this affair is well wound up, he'll be taking French leave of us. That was a close call he had that time, Miss Fane! Great luck, your finding him!"

A half-audible "Yes" from Alison was presently followed by Leigh's saying: "There! Your friend Miss Homer's out in the lane with old Janet looking for you, I declare!"

And sure enough the pair of trusty allies were to be

seen, Miss Homer having extended her visit to include a welcome of one she regarded actually as a kinswoman, and certainly one after her own heart.

But scarcely a word was exchanged as the trio clasped hands; beaming eyes and broad smiles, however, made the welcome hearty, and Alison was led into her little parlor in a sort of triumph, while the odors reaching from the kitchen heralded a repast such as Miss Homer considered worthy this decidedly important occasion.

"Now, then," said Mr. Leigh brightly, "I suppose I can't leave you in better hands just now, can I? May I tell Agnes that you will see her soon?"

"Yes," said Alison quickly. "But, Mr. Leigh, one word, please, before you go." She had entered the little parlor, and stood there now among its homely but home-like surroundings, all so full of meaning to her that her heart was beating swiftly. "I want to impress one thing clearly, definitely, upon you. *Whatever* be the result of the business conference I believe you already know something about, *nothing*, I trust, can alter the friendship, remember, you and Agnes offered me in my lonely, friendless estate. No, no,"—she smiled faintly as he was about to speak,— "I am not, perhaps never will be, so happy and prosperous a woman that I can afford to lose what is more to me, *has* been more, than you can ever think."

She held out her hand, and as Leigh grasped it cordially he exclaimed:

"If there were only more Alison Fanes among us——"

She shook her head, still smiling. "No, no, I am nothing to be proud of yet, only—don't desert me."

"By Jove!" was Leigh's mental exclamation as he walked away. "Is Hugh Broderick blind, or a fool, or only—is it that cursed pride of his? And a girl in a

million anywhere! Why, any one claim she could set up would make most of men's nerves tingle! How came it I didn't, as Agnes did, think her more than ordinarily good-looking at first? Why, when her eyes light up, and that,—I don't know what it is exactly,—comes into her face, the girl's an absolute beauty! What *can* Broderick be thinking of? The old duffer! I declare, I'll tell him so to his face, I do believe, before long."

And the worthy young master of Braune House went his way homeward, and to the late luncheon or early dinner awaiting him, with talk enough ready to interest, amuse, and brighten Agnes, whom he had lately discovered was full of a keen, bright wit which perhaps had lain a bit too long rusting, and was just saved in time to prevent its degenerating into those sarcastic powers which many women,—and men, too, no doubt,—pride themselves upon possessing, to be at once the annoyance and delight of their acquaintances and,—saving the mark!—friends.

CHAPTER L.

"THERE you are! I declare, you dear girl, how glad I am to see you!"

And Miss Egerton made a prompt rush for Alison as she appeared at the doctor's gate-way, and bore her off in triumph to the family sitting-room and a really motherly embrace from the doctor's wife.

"Father and those gentlemen on business are all in the dining-room," Kate went on with her usual volubility, "and, mother, doesn't she look tired, poor child? Never mind; a whiff or two of our old Exeford air will set you up. Dear me, it seems an age since you went away, and if all that the birds of the air are carrying about is true——" Kate broke off rather abruptly, with a searching glance Alison could not misunderstand, while as she left them Mrs. Egerton gave her head a meaning shake.

"The birds of the air are great busybodies," laughed Alison; "but, O Kate, if they've told you to be *very* polite, what you call *nice*, to my special friend, Mr. Winstane, your brother Guy's chum, then I'll forgive them."

"The young man with the very top-lofty manner and eyeglasses?"

"He wears eyeglasses; as for his top-loftiness, I can't say it prevented his being a most delightful travelling companion. His father is, oh, such a darling! a real Virginia gentleman! I'm angling and fishing and sighing for an invitation to visit them in Virginia some day."

"Alison Fane, are you a rank impostor, or only the duckiest girl on earth?"

"I don't know about the last. Yes, perhaps I am an impostor, like most of us. But, O Katrina! not when I say my heart's in Exeford, and glad I am to see it!"

"For *it*," thought Kate, "read *him* this time!" But aloud she answered lightly:

"I'd break my bank upstairs to leave Exeford for a while, as I'm tired of everything in it."

"If I invite you to go away with me, then, will you decline?" laughed Alison.

"I'll grovel to you for asking me," was Kitty's retort; and then came sounds of moving chairs, the opening of doors, and presently Dr. Egerton, looking very grave, rather pale, in fact, came out, approached Alison, holding out his hand courteously as he said:

"My dear, will you step into the dining-room for a moment? We—the gentlemen wish to see you."

And Alison, wishing heartily the next half hour was well over, stood up and slowly followed the good doctor from the room, Kitty silenced by the solemnity of her father's manner, the evident importance of what was going on, in which, as she knew, Alison's interests were somehow under discussion.

All eyes were turned naturally upon the slender young figure at the doctor's side as he re-entered the room, and if there was a certain embarrassment in her manner, inseparable from her feeling on such an occasion, there was an unusual dignity about the young girl, something which one and all felt, and which gave her at once a personal importance even in that grave and dignified company. She might have been a young sovereign coming to receive the insignia of her rights as she stood among them, her embarrassment shown only in her pallor and the down-cast lids of her dark eyes; but when Jack Leigh stood up,

saying courteously: "Doctor, shall Miss Fane sit down over there?" indicating a place near the table, Alison looked up, a happy, gentle smile covering her face as she took the seat indicated, while introduction to the only actual strangers present, Mr. Brice, a well-known lawyer, and his clerk, was gone through, and Alison, glancing about, saw that the rest of the company included the principal directors of Gorman's Mills, an old retired sea-captain, supposed to have large interests in the concern, and an ex-judge, also in some remote way connected with it.

The fact of this gathering of forces alone indicated how important the occasion was, and young Winstane's voice, with its agreeable Southern accent, saying: "Now, then, if you please, gentlemen," led the way to the important part of the business meeting.

Gradually, as she became accustomed to the voices, the idea that they were all talking to, at, or of her, Alison's shyness wore away, and in the next ten minutes she found herself only an anxious, interested listener, while they explained to her that they were one and all, as directors of the company, admirers, etc., quite ready and willing to believe she was really the sole heir to all the estate, real and personal, of the late Mrs. Rachel Broderick.

"And I must say, my dear young lady," said Judge Brownell, looking at the girl before him over the rim of his spectacles, and speaking in the very gentlest accents, "we are one and all only anxious to see you assert your authority, and to welcome you among us. Fortunately, the—ahem—well, somewhat careless management has not done too much harm; the business is a most important one, and will, we hope, prosper for many a year to come."

And Alison could only once again smile and look what

she could not speak, but in the eager talk which ensued she understood that, her claim having been virtually established, a very few preliminaries would be needed to complete legal proceedings which would make her understood and acknowledged to be Rachel Broderick's sole heir; the fact was in reality accomplished. When Alison stood up at last, she was virtually recognized what she had known herself all those months really to be, the mistress of "Gorman's" and the wealth it had accumulated, but, as she afterward thought with a smile of pleasure, such was the peculiar spirit of the town which had made the fortune for her that, even in the little breeze of congratulation and laughing, pleasant comment which followed, there was no more of actual politeness and deference than had been shown her in this very house when she was only one of Gorman's "hands." Not a whit more was she respected as she stood among them, heiress to the Broderick wealth, than she had been as simple Alison Fane, rather handicapped than otherwise by her relationship to old "Madam Broderick."

"Very glad to have the pleasure of meeting you, my dear," from the old judge as he shook her by both hands. "I remember your father perfectly. Wonderful likeness to him about the mouth and eyes. Ahem! my wife and daughter will call upon you with pleasure. Eh? what did you say—Bend Lane? Upon my word, you *have* been hiding yourself," etc., etc.

And so it went on, Alison too young and healthy-minded not to enjoy it all to a degree. At last the all-important *séance* was ended, and Jack Leigh approached, holding out his hand:

"Brava, Miss Fane! I declare, you have done admirably! Even the judge's address was well answered!

We'll be sending you to congress as a special delegate some day, I am sure; what do you say, Winstane?"

Alison laughed, and the young Virginian, with mock horror, held up his hands.

"We'll get her down to Virginia," he exclaimed, "and show her the royal way to fame among us. We boast the woman's kingdom, you know!"

"I am sure of it. Don't repent your invitation," she answered gayly. "For my heart is set on it, especially after meeting your father. I am so anxious to see Agnes!" she added, breaking off to look earnestly at Jack.

"And she to see you. Have you quite understood all these formalities, I wonder? Do you imagine you will have to 'boss' Gorman's,—the old name sticks,—in person?"

"Fancy it! No, indeed! Are not all these gentlemen stockholders and directors and things just as usual?"

"Precisely; you will only require a thoroughly competent, experienced, reliable, and honest manager."

He spoke with a shrewd look and smile which made Alison's color deepen, but she nodded her head, said "No doubt," and then turned to answer a remark from Kitty Egerton, who had drawn near.

"Thank you so much. I can't stay to-day," in response to an invitation to dinner. "You know I am going over to see Agnes, and first must attend to one or two matters at home."

"Well, to-morrow, perhaps," said Kitty, gazing with affectionate pride upon Alison. "Anyway, you must be tired out, I am sure, and need a rest now above all things."

"No," said Alison brightly. "I feel uncommonly well, 'quite fit,' as your brother says. O Kitty, where is that sweet mother of yours? I want a word with her so much."

Mrs. Egerton was found in a tiny little room, squeezed in between the parlor and the doctor's study, devoted to various household purposes of her own, and Alison dashed right into her subject.

"Oh, Mrs. Egerton!" she exclaimed, as the large-hearted woman clasped her by both hands, drawing her down beside her on the deep, old-fashioned sofa. "I feel so stranded in some ways! No girl, it seems to me, ever needed advice—a real mother's counsel—more than I do this moment. It's all very fine to be acknowledged as my grandmother's heiress, but—oh, but——"

Mrs. Egerton smiled. "Yes, my love, I know just what that means; but, somehow, little as I have seen of you, I'm some way not afraid of prosperity for you, and you know what I think of my husband's opinion. Well, he's not afraid."

"Oh, the money part doesn't frighten me," declared Alison, gazing out upon the wintry lawn and now desolate but sunny garden framed in the window near her. "But I don't want first of all to use my prosperity badly, nor because of it to have others use me so."

Mrs. Egerton regarded the fine, spirited, but gentle young face of the girl beside her with a moment's grave, anxious reflection. She was almost certain she guessed at the deeper meaning conveyed in Alison's sigh and words, and she—alas! too well—knew her little daughter's secret. But, in spite of all the wealth of mother-love, the momentary temptation to put the newly made heiress of "Gorman's" on her guard against letting her heart "follow its leading," Mary Egerton was too true, too fine, a woman not to say just what she felt and believed to be the truth; and as Alison, feeling her involuntary tightening of the hands she still held in hers, turned her eyes back to Mrs.

Egerton's face, the latter said with a gentle, beautiful gravity which made her face and voice at that moment always to be remembered:

"My child, I think I know what you mean, and let me tell you this: Be true to your *best* instincts in this matter! Act fearlessly and bravely. Do not put on any foolish airs of holding yourself aloof. Be your own sweet, true, natural self, and if there is, as I believe to be the case, an honest man's love waiting for you, make the way easy for him, lest in your new position he think that you have put all faith in him aside. There, now! Don't get so terribly red, my dear! We haven't been telling any state secrets. And, remember, I've had a very useful pair of wide-open eyes,"—Mrs. Egerton hesitated, a look strangely sad crossed her face,—“a mother's eyes, Alison,” she added in a lower tone. “Ah! how far they see only we mothers, poor things, ever know.”

And then, abruptly leaving Alison in a frame of mind where if speech was hard, thought at least was rapid enough, Mrs. Egerton stood up, and, going to the window, made some commonplace remark about her plants, and Alison could only wonder; her half guess startled her, yet to pursue the subject was now impossible, and, anxious to promote one object of her visit, she spoke of young Winstane, his friendship for Guy, his fine opening in life under his father's auspices.

“Ah, yes!” sighed Mrs. Egerton. “He seems a delightful young fellow. Guy says his record at college was A1 all through. I hope he'll come back again to see us. What on earth is Kitty doing out there?” she added, breaking off suddenly, as from the window the dauntless Kate was to be seen leading the young Virginian toward the dog kennels. “Oh, that wonderful pup of Guy's!” she

exclaimed, laughing. "I declare, that girl of mine is a funny mixture."

"She's a darling!" exclaimed Alison, as she beheld the elegant young Winstane almost on his knees with Kitty in front of the largest kennel.

But the business of the day was in Alison's mind only begun. How was she to meet Broderick, who she felt tolerably certain would seek her very soon? Concealment of her real position was at an end. And then she roused herself to bid good-by for the present, to speak of Mr. Robbins' efficient aid in all this, finally, to agree that at four o'clock she would be quite ready to go back with Jack Leigh to Braune House and Agnes.

She had insisted so urgently upon going back to Bend Lane alone that there was nothing to do but let her have her own way, but of course certain business meetings must follow later.

"And if I'm not mistaken," observed Judge Brownell, "we'll have to try and restrain our young friend a little, or she'll be too promiscuous in her—well, money favors; charity isn't the word to use."

"Pre-cisely, pre-cisely!" echoed Mr. Brice; and the gentlemen after a little further discussion went their several ways, no one overtaking Alison, who had chosen an out-of-the-way route to the cottage, anxious, glad of the quiet chance, to think quite by herself as she walked along.

CHAPTER LI.

GREAT as had been the work of the morning, deeply as it had stirred her very heart's depths, it was all as nothing to what as she entered the cottage she saw was before her. Broderick, in his familiar attitude, was standing by the mantel, his eyes fixed with quiet earnestness upon the door-way, which for an instant framed her hesitating, reluctant figure.

But it was for an instant only.

Alison, taking in swiftly certain changes his illness had wrought,—the thin outline of his cheek, the rather sunken eyes, the settled gravity of his expression,—felt only how much he needed rest and care, and as usual her eyes spoke for her, for Broderick, with that rare, sweet smile, came forward, held out his hand, and saying: "Am I like a ghost that I frighten you?" brought the color back to her cheeks and self-possession to her manner.

"It almost seemed so!" she said, not at once withdrawing the hand that rested in his. "Oh, I am *very* glad to see you in the flesh again! You look thin and worn, but it—is you!"

"And for yourself?" Broderick's heart was rather desperate in its movements, but he controlled his voice as he looked down, eagerly taking in the outlines of the face that had never once left his mind since he had seen it last; every feature, expression, was known and dear to him: its altered look now, the anxious, half-frightened eyes, the sweet mouth, drooping, he fancied, yet striving to smile; it seemed to the man as though, gaze as he might, he could

never half fill up the longing anxiety absence had created. And to think what a strange, sordid barrier was this that separated them! What a life they two, kindred in all the higher tastes and cravings of the soul and mind, alike in the main aims of existence, ambition to them only a means of expanding noble purposes, yet equally drawn together by the bond of simple faith and affection—what a life they might lead! The very thought seemed as it rushed across Broderick's heart and mind to make him dizzy with all it implied.

"Am I changed?" said the girl lightly. "No, no, I think not. I am tired of nearly everything, and this—these last developments leave me hopelessly at sea. Ah! was ever a girl, I wonder, quite so much in need of help?"

"No," said Broderick, calm again, and smiling in his old, half-tormenting fashion. "I quite agree with you. Some day, if I ever intrude upon your new world, I want to hear a great deal from your own lips about the past. I understand now you have inherited at least part of Gorman's."

There was a brief, a scarcely momentary, hesitation. Then Alison, looking at him very gravely, said in a simple way:

"I own it all, they tell me, under my grandmother's last will. I believe there is no disputing the fact."

She moved over to the window, stood there, not daring to trust herself to look back at Broderick, in whose absolute silence was something she could not fail to dread, yet she longed to have him speak, and when he did so, turned swiftly, not moving, however, from the place she had taken.

"I have long expected this, or something like it," he said slowly. "There was always something incomprehensible to me in your coming as you did, unless with a

motive, since I knew, of course, the idea of your needing a trade was absurd. You could—you were equipped to support yourself surely in some easier fashion. Then that night you talked to Gorman——”

“Ah!” exclaimed Alison, a light breaking in upon her now, revealing much that had seemed inexplicable in Broderick’s change of manner; “so you heard that?”

“Enough to understand that you were there as at least part heir to the whole concern. Understand me: I was no willing eavesdropper. Where I stood I could not move without revealing myself, and but for all that followed later I would certainly have let you know precisely what I heard; and then my accident——”

The pause was significant. Alison was silent for an instant of doubt, of dread, lest in any way that which she might do or say would seem unwomanly, yet to be tortured in this fashion was unendurable.

“Do you remember,” she said slowly, but looking at him with very gentle eyes, “anything of what was said when—I found you?”

“Alison!” Broderick moved forward, his sombre eyes lighting as with a great, overmastering joy. “Listen to me! I cannot be mistaken! It is not, *must* not, be *all* dreamland! Surely, in those supreme moments when death seemed so awfully, surely, near, it was from your heart, your deepest, truest impulses, you spoke. There could have been no question of worldly motives then. If ever the lips carried the message of the soul, yours did when I felt them, Alison, wounded, faint as I was, laid against my cheek. Can it have been all a dream?”

“Hugh!” the girl exclaimed, tears starting to her eyes. “Yet you talk of this wretched money as something that could dare to come between us!”

"You are right!" the man exclaimed, moving forward, and, seizing both her hands, he looked down into her face with an expression of command, and yet infinite tenderness. "Alison, there are not, should not, be barriers between us of our own making. Look up at me, my child! Ah, I read my earthly joy, Alison, in those eyes of yours; and yet, dear, I dare not even yet ask or allow a pledge. You must see another, wider, world before I dare to bid you—to let you say what I shall be all and every day longing to hear."

"Ah," cried Alison, "you are too stern, too exacting! What is it you mean me to do?"

"I mean," said Broderick slowly, dropping the fingers he had nearly crushed, and walking back to the fireside, where, however, he did not for an instant release her from his intent gaze—"I mean you to go away, perhaps with these people, the Winstanes, to Washington, and see the life of the gayest city in the universe and all that its triumphs can offer you. Remember, I shall go on here; if,"—he smiled,—“you so arrange it, I will be working for your business interests still; then, when you have gone the rounds, if you still can come to me, can send for me to hear those words I—yes, I have heard you speak once: ‘Hugh, *I love you*——’” He broke off, then resumed: "If such a life as I lead, simple in its daily routine—if such a life, with me, Alison, to love and cherish, guide and care for your slightest wish as though it were Heaven's own law, can be ours, then, my dearest, I will thank God for having the greatest of all earthly goods at last my own."

"I yield; I *must*, I suppose," she said, with simply a shy, upward glance. "And the little gift, or token, I bought the other day for you in New York must be my pledge of submission. Oh, that it should have come to this with me, with all my independent theories!"

He laughed, the joyous, deep-hearted laugh she had not heard in many a day, watched her take from a case in her writing-desk a little packet, which she bid him open when he was alone at home. "It is too small to be valuable of itself," she said. "I want you to let it remind you of me in the best way."

There was a brief pause.

"I must be going," Broderick said. "And you are to start at once to Braune House. Agnes Leigh is most impatient to see you."

"Yes." The remembrance of all the visit meant brought a shade to Alison's bright look.

"And I suppose you will be off at once for New York. Ah!" with a long drawn breath, "shall I ever control you, I wonder?"

"No!" said the girl gayly. "You may advise, counsel, commend, ask, and I will yield. Control, command, and I will rebel!"

"Questions, terms, no right-minded beings should ever need to employ," said Broderick, with a half smile. "Well, this is really good-by. I shall not see you, perhaps, alone again before your flitting. Your friend in New York, Miss Benton—her wedding takes place soon?"

"Yes; then I hope to start with Kitty Egerton for the Washington trip."

He held out his hand. Alison let her fingers rest tranquilly in it for a moment. He had reached the door when suddenly he turned, looked at her, and in the next instant was at her side, his arms enfolded her slender young form in a close embrace, his lips sought hers for a brief moment,—the first lover's kiss that had ever rested on their unsullied youth,—and a moment later Alison was alone.

CHAPTER LII.

AGNES LEIGH was slowly pacing the great hall of Braune House the same afternoon, listening for every sound of wheels on the drive, as Jack had telegraphed over when he and Alison might be expected. "The news," as Alison's heiress-ship was considered, had already gone the rounds, each gentleman, of course, at the conference carrying home a budget, and Mr. Robbins, in his most triumphant mood, was to spend the next morning with the Braune House party.

But Agnes' impatience to welcome Alison was a purely personal one; true, she did most heartily rejoice in her friend and favorite's good fortune, but it was only an accidental circumstance; the root of their friendship lay too deep to have it affected by externals; and, as Agnes slowly walked up and down the beautiful hall of her old home, the firelight playing on her dark brown velvet draperies, her daintily poised head, her proud, sweet young face, she smiled to think how happy Alison would be to find her home as it was, its tranquillity so assured.

For Jack, whatever the brief spell of forgetfulness of his duty or happiness had wrought, was certainly all that Agnes could expect or hope for now, as eager to please, interest, and occupy her with himself as he had ever been, to so fill up her time that she should not miss him or look for his coming. A very persistent "home bird" he would never be, but his flittings now could never distress her. She was no woman to tie any man to her apron-strings.

Rather she enjoyed his going out into his own world, since it brought him back all the readier to appreciate and care for home; and the business anxieties had been shared together, Agnes' counsels proving her well worthy of being something more than a silent partner in the sterner side of his life.

"Strange," Jack had thought more than once that winter, as he plodded home on his gray mare after a sharp run out in the country, "how much a man can discover in his own wife's society if he only sets about it!" And some decidedly unflattering reminiscences of the fair Tasia's efforts a year ago to keep him at her side rose up, effaced quickly enough as he thought of the quiet, graceful, interesting girl waiting for him at home, how she would look, what she would say, etc., when he told her this or that of the day's small happenings; and Leigh, who was fast establishing a reputation at his club as a very hopeless *benedict*, smiled contentedly, wondering if it took other men so long to make companions of the women whose young lives they asked for so easily, and pledged themselves to honor with such careless ease.

The welcome sounds came at last. Peter, the butler, was prompt in flinging open the door, and the next instant Alison was clasped warmly in her friend's embrace.

"I say, Aggie!" from Jack, who was rubbing his hands briskly before the splendid fire. "Do shout at those people or something to hurry up dinner. I'm literally famished, and so is Alison, I'm sure. There's a good soul! You've all the time there is to talk afterward."

And Alison could not but smile with pleasure at the very tone of Jack's voice, the way in which Agnes made haste to do his bidding—if not exactly to "shout" at the kitchen department, at least to despatch urgent orders;

and then Alison was once more in her old room, where Agnes held her at arm's-length, examining her critically, smilingly, and in silence.

"Well," she said at last, "you're not looking quite up to the mark physically, but then—what an experience! And to think how sly a young dame you were all the time! We ought to punish you severely."

"What!" exclaimed Alison, "for seeing with my own eyes, hearing with my own ears! Come now, Agnes! I count on you for a tremendous deal of support, for I have a little hard time ahead of me, I assure you."

"Humph! How? Why, you'll have the world at your feet! What between this romantic story and your money and your not being some raw, untamed specimen to start with—— My dear, I foresee nothing but one prolonged dazzle and applause wherever you go."

"Like the Banbury Cross lady, I suppose," exclaimed Alison. "Well, rings on my fingers and bells on my toes are not *my* idea of a good time, I assure you! I suppose, however, one's bringing up is something to be grateful for, and it always makes my thoughts of poor Mrs. Gildersleeve kindly. But for her I don't doubt you'd have a very distressing person to deal with."

"H'm-m—I don't know. Alison, I fancy you'd be, and will be, yourself, come what may. Well, I suppose everyone was properly surprised and congratulatory and all that? You know Jack 'll never give me details. I kept thinking of—so many things."

There was a brief pause; then,—for it seemed wisest to have it said at once, and the ice broken,—Alison took her friend's hands in hers, saying very gently:

"Agnes, I have seen Gray Gorman, you know; he desired me to assure you that he had married little Alice

Shelton only to be a good husband to her and to treat her well. They have gone out West. A good opening offered. All that miserable business never need be known, or even referred to again. He is anxious for your good wishes on his new life."

A flush, painful, but flitting, crossed Agnes' pale, proud face, but when it faded, she was perfectly calm; indeed, with but little effort to be so. That she held her husband's happiness now, where she had really always held his honor, made this episode, if painful, only so in having ever entered or darkened her life. The lesson would be a lifelong one.

"Alison, you have been our good angel on all sides!" she exclaimed, looking with tears on her dark lashes at her friend. "See! Thank God! not a thought save one of pitying kindness is there on my mind for the poor fellow; and I only hope he *will* do well by her. Poor little girl! She was very young to undertake so much. Before you leave I will write to them both, and you shall see the letter. O Alison, Alison, *think!*" added Agnes, with a shiver, and clasping her hands closely together—"think what an escape! Though I meant only to frighten Jack! My whole life might have been blighted, would have been, but——"

"For your seeking the right help, dear Agnes," said Alison quickly. "And now it is all over long, long ago! You must never think of it again. You have only God to thank and Jack's interest to care for. And, O Agnes, rejoice in it all, dear! Above all, that you love him!"

"Ah!" sighed the young wife, while a look of deep content came into her face. "There is the most potent charm a wife can use, or *vice versa*. Divine alchemy, Alison! How it turns our coldest iron into gold!"

And if Alison said nothing in words, it was not because an echo of the sentiment was lacking.

Jack, while he carved the well-cooked, savory turkey at dinner a little later, was quite ready to talk enough even to meet his wife's demands, and while they lingered over dessert, he was really quite eloquent; the whole affair, he declared, from first to last was worth recording. "And as for Broderick! Well, Agnes," he summed up, "you're no girl of mine if you don't have him over here right away and treat him like a prince."

"Oh, I don't doubt he'll come fast enough," said Agnes demurely, "if it's only to see that we are taking good care of the new lady of the mills. I fancy, Alison, he thinks you capable of anything startling now."

"No doubt," assented Alison. "I shouldn't like," she added, "to have to be a working partner in the mills with this—hero of yours; he is—must be terribly exacting."

"And no soft, easy-going man would ever control you, my young lady," declared Agnes. "Come, let us have some music," she said, rising, with the quick power of transition in impulse and action which was her leading characteristic, and quite her most attractive quality to the pleasure-loving Jack. "Alison, I wonder if you have forgotten the last time, to quote Mr. Ogdenthorpe, we 'made music' here."

"Can I ever forget it?" exclaimed Alison, as she followed her hostess into the great hall. "Ah, what a potent spell it is! Agnes, you must not forget your own scheme for a music school. There!" she added, flashing a sunny look upon Jack, who was following and preparing to make himself comfortable with old Marco as usual at his feet. "You see, I am laying plans already. Yes, we shall have our school, Agnes and I, and a Leigh medal yearly!"

"I think I can see Jack bestowing it on some blushing young creature who has just gone through ——'s exercises at the risk of her lung power," said Agnes. "And the neat little address he will make! As he did over on the Fair grounds! Oh, you missed that rare treat, Alison. He actually made a speech from the judges' stand—all about horses and agriculture and the silver dollar and I don't know what all; I almost had hopes for next year in congress."

"Are you going to sing or not—you two?" enquired Jack, trying not to smile, but, as Agnes, in passing him to reach the music stand, rested her hand lightly an instant on his shoulder, he turned his head, bestowing a light kiss on her soft fingers, and saying good-humoredly:

"Sing 'Ah, non guinge,' Agnes; it's a long time since you condescended to mere opera."

"I had meant to forswear it," said Agnes, going back to the piano. "But it's such a privilege for you to show a preference, my dear boy, I'd sing anything you asked for."

And very soon the clear, pure notes of her nearly perfect voice in the "Sonnambula's" aria floated out, Alison accompanying her with the genuine pleasure it always gave her to be part of such music; for as Agnes' singing was truly that of the *artiste*, so was her companion's keen appreciation and enjoyment; and the master of the house, by no means the unappreciative listener his silence or apparent abstraction would make it seem, determined Agnes, poor child, should have the enjoyment her musical nature craved. It was not a bad idea, this of the music-school, and what a little trump Alison was turning out to be!

It was to Alison, as well as her hostess, a most amusing

and home-like evening. As before, the influences of the fine old house "fitted" her to perfection; the wheels of life moving softly pleased her thoroughly, and when she once more found herself *tête-à-tête* with Agnes in her dainty, luxurious dressing-room, it was only natural to mention those who had formed the subject of their discourse here once before, and in telling Agnes of the Harrimans, the plan for co-operative housekeeping which had been made, Tasia Mordaunt's name of course was mentioned; indeed, both Agnes and Alison were anxious to have the old subject renewed—and dismissed.

"I never see her," said Agnes carelessly. "She is going abroad, I believe; it is reported for an indefinite period. I think, dear Alison," added Jack's wife, with a smile, flitting, but quite contented in its meaning, "that chapter is closed forever! Ah, there is nothing, after, all like treachery to disgust any man. Such,—what shall I call them?—unhallowed fancies cannot live. They are never aught but Dead Sea fruit. Once tasted they wither, die of themselves." She hesitated a moment, then went on: "Dear little Bessie! How glad I am you found her! She deserves all her good fortune. You must tell her so from me, and that I hope she thinks of me as I am, really her friend. Poor Grandmamma Willets! I wonder whether she can see the result of all her anxious plots and plans now? Heigh-ho! Alison, I believe you and I could talk forever; but I must, as Jack says, let you off easily to-night. Go, dearest; get some 'beauty sleep.' You must coax back the roses into those pale little cheeks of yours for to-morrow. And your man of business, Mr. Robbins, will be here."

CHAPTER LIII.

ALISON opened her eyes one morning on the delicate luxuries with which she was surrounded, remembering in the next instant what had brought her here, and who was coming.

She made her toilet quickly, yet may be forgiven for lingering a trifle longer than was her wont over the arrangement of her simple costume of light brown wool relieved by trimmings of darker velvet. There would be a "red, red rose" to be had in the conservatory, which reflection set her to humming the dear old ballad, and as she turned the bend in the staircase to the tune of "Tho' a' the seas gang dry, my love, and the rocks melt in the sun," Jack looked up from his usual morning place at the fireside to enquire whether she had ever analyzed that very captivating song; he quite admitted its fascination as a bit of rhyme, dainty sentiment, and most "catchy music," but——

"You see," he observed, as Alison drew near, "it's the easiest thing on earth to declare you'll be true and come again even if rocks melt and seas run dry. Now, he ought to have said, my dear, I come to you even if I lose one boat or two, and the bank has burst. What is left of me is at your disposal. See? I've often thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to write little companion pieces to those highly glazed ballads we're brought up on."

"Jack, you goose!" said Agnes, appearing from the den door. "Alison, do you understand him yet?"

"So far," she admitted. "But really a little label on most people now and then wouldn't do any harm."

"Thinking of the conference ahead, eh? Oh, sail right in," declared Jack. "Robbins is ready to back you as the winning card anywhere. Now, then,"—with an absurdly appealing glance at Agnes,—“must I again use brute force with the breakfast dishes?”

But the majestic butler saved any such catastrophe by announcing at that moment that the morning meal was ready, and it was Jack himself who kept them waiting, returning with two “red, red roses” and dark leaves which he proceeded to lay by Alison’s plate, giving a bit of delicate stephanotis and fern to his wife.

“One for you and one for—Mr. Robbins,” said Jack, with a nod at the roses. “Is he fond of flowers, I wonder? Jove, Agnes, I never saw such a wide-awake little man! What he doesn’t see need bother no one! Well, well, Maid of the Mill, go ahead and prosper! I’m profoundly glad, however, you can’t swoop down on all the board of managers and be giving the place away at Christmas in buns and blankets and tons of coal.”

“Possibly Alison can eat another piece of that broiled ham,” suggested Agnes; but Alison declared she had breakfasted very well, and urged Jack on to more nonsense by relating how a certain old gentleman had told her once that all the operatives in a factory he knew about had to sing at their work hymns of his composition.

“You might compose an operetta or two,” Jack suggested, “to be given while the machines are worked. Oh, I don’t doubt the place will yet lure a New York reporter into our midst. Indeed, I thought from certain questions put me at the club yesterday he was here. But that honor still awaits us. Hello, Marco! Bow to Miss Fane, you

rascal. Wait till she gets going and brings her smallest pug or skye over to visit you!"

Alison would not for a great deal have foregone the pleasure of seeing her friends at Braune House as she found them now, and it was no task to accompany Jack into his own den on this occasion and talk over certain plans he had been forming for the winter. "You must come back to us," he said with genuine sincerity, "after the Washington wings are tried a little; you must come here for a happy, quiet little visit." And then the talk became of business matters only, Jack's keen good-sense as apparent now as the light-hearted buffoonery of an hour ago; and Alison could not help remembering what Agnes had said the night before: that to keep him in leading-strings might be foolish and impossible, but there was no doubt that now he found his happiness in his home.

Alison and Agnes were in the hall when the visitors arrived. If she drew back a little until she could accustom herself to the sound of Broderick's voice, the sight of his face and figure here among friends who at best could only suspect their peculiar relationship, no one appeared to notice it in the general confusion of voices, and presently she found that contumacious master workman at her side forcing her to withdraw slightly from the others, while, although he only said "Well?" his eyes and voice expressed much more.

"It is delightful to be here," said Alison rather tamely. "I sink easily, you remember, into such grooves." She looked at him with a tremble in her eyes.

"Oh, yes! I don't doubt you'll find them well adjusted in Washington. How happy your little friend Robbins looks! Do you see what he is up to?" he added, lowering his voice, and indicating the busy and delighted legal

gentleman, who was sauntering about, mentally appraising everything in the fine old hall, a little touch of his finger here, a quick mental calculation there, making the whole matter appear as dollars and cents to him. "There's a business mind for you, Alison." Her name on his lips came yet with a delicious sense of possession and set the girl's pulses to a happier measure.

"Well, all to our own kind!" said Alison lightly. "I enjoy so much," she added, "seeing how happy Jack and Agnes seem to be."

"Yes," said Broderick slowly. "The cloud has lifted. God grant it is forever."

"Now, then," said the alert Robbins suddenly, "I believe we're—ahem—to have a little business talk in the library." And with every possible politeness he glanced at his host, then at the ladies, and, as Mr. Leigh somewhat informally led the way, the others, talking and laughing pleasantly, followed.

All was at last settled—this informal discussion of affairs in which, if Alison was the prime object, she was by no means the only interested party; and when certain arrangements were discussed, her special and immediate requirements considered, it was found that, commonplace as Mr. Robbins might be in some ways, where such matters were concerned he was all that the most exacting business man or woman could require, and at last Alison thoroughly understood and accepted her position.

"Gorman's" with all it involved was hers, "properties" of different value elsewhere, a considerable—to her eyes inexhaustible—fund was already at the banker's ready for her "sign and seal" to be placed wholly at her disposal. Whatever she had been a year ago, would be in the future, she stood among them then with the reins of what was

really wealth in her young hands, and almost her first question was "how soon she could see, or have seen, people like the Marks family."

"There she goes!" whispered Robbins to the highly amused Agnes, as they moved away. "Oh, how thankful I am she has such shrewd executors to satisfy. *Think* of what she'd do if we gave her her head!"

"And what next?" Broderick said in a quietly amused tone.

"Next?" said Alison, rousing herself from a brief abstraction. "Well, I think I'd like to go over to Bend Lane for a little while, and perhaps talk things over with Miss Homer, and then New York once more for Hilda's wedding."

"And what," he went on, "shall you do with the paper Mr. Robbins says Gray Gorman gave you?"

"That is what will take me back to Exeford. I don't want to hurt his family, that is, his mother and sisters; they must have suffered enough. But his marriage must be made known *at once*, and the men, the work-people accused, set right."

Broderick looked down upon her with a gleam of fun in his handsome eyes.

"I wonder," he said gravely, "if you will think,—as your foreman, you know,—I need putting in my place, if I tell you that part of the business has been settled. I have seen them all,—you are a great heroine over there,—and every one discharged to suit Gorman's purpose is back again, with a promise that lost time shall be counted in this week's wages."

"You, the stern master of Gorman's, actually have done all this? Well, I have some hope for you! The future is not quite the dark weight it has been on my mind!

Poor little Jenny Marks! I shall be so proud to see her now."

And as Alison moved away, not caring to make their *tête-à-tête* seem prolonged, Broderick rested his arm on the mantel and looked at her with a smile of profound satisfaction.

"She was right, after all, poor Mrs. Broderick!" he reflected. "There is no question that between us we did the best to bring out the real metal, the real grit, in her, and now Washington, and her reputation as a beauty and an heiress, may do the rest."

CHAPTER LIV.

"THERE aint a better cold-weather supper going," observed Mrs. Norton, giving her cap-strings an effectual tie-back, "than sausage and mashed potatoes when they're done right. I guess Miss Fane 'll make a nice, hearty meal to-night. Now, hurry up, girls; she's sure to be in soon."

And a cheerful clatter of plates, knives and forks, etc., announced the setting forth of a supper which would be a cheerful, home-like welcome to the distinguished guest.

For, in spite of Mr. Winstane's suggestion that she should go to some hotel with old Janet, Alison was resolute in returning to her first friends, the Nortons, and, as news of her good fortune had flown on those ready unseen wings which carry so much news about, it may well be imagined that the reception awaiting her was indeed as to one who, as had been suggested, was a heroine of romance, and fully justified Mrs. Norton in her repeated "Didn't I tell you so's?" or "What else did you *expect*?" while, as the redoubtable Mr. Rokesmith, to say nothing of the two Messrs. Robbins, John, Sr. and Jr., were expected, it may easily be imagined that the household in Benton Place was in an agreeable flutter.

The parlor floor front and rear had been made ready. Hilda's room upstairs was waiting for Alison's first reception, and Hilda herself, wonderfully bright, had with dainty touches arranged the cut flowers Dr. Holton had indulged in for this occasion, and was eagerly looking forward to a long talk even that night with Alison about the

altogether wonderful preparations set going for the co-operative housekeeping in Mordick Street. They were to go over there early the next day.

"There they are!" called Connor in a stentorian voice from his mother's room, where he was putting the last touches to his own toilet, and in a moment the cab wheels at the door drew up, a very distinguished-looking young gentleman handed out Alison and Janet Holdsworthy, bowing himself away, while the eagerly looked for guests found the front door flung widely open and the family in various degrees of haste flocking to meet them.

Everybody had so much to say at once that the evening meal was, in spite of all efforts at order, the scene of considerable excitement, and Alison hardly knew what was going on; but at last there was comparative quiet. Mrs. Norton had followed Alison up to the parlor, and while our heroine was making a little alteration in her dress for the evening, the "great piece of news" was told.

"You see, my dear," said Mrs. Norton, sitting down in the deep rocker and smoothing out her apron complacently, "as it's all due to you, you should have known it first and foremost, only that you were coming back so soon, and, after all, it was rather sudden. Well, you see, Molly and Billy Rokesmith are to be married on the 20th, so as to let 'em start right away out West. And then there's Miss Benton and the doctor. Now, if you please, what do they all do but talk me into having a double wedding! My Molly and Billy Rokesmith, and Miss Hilda and the doctor. No fuss and feathers! Just a quiet little time. And I believe there's money in that idea of the old Mordick Street house. Anyway, it's wonderful how it's being gotten on with already."

"Enchanting!" exclaimed Alison. "Well, you see, Mrs.

Norton, just as well for you to get these young birds of yours settled, for I mean to claim you for a visit to my new home in Washington."

"Now, there—stop!" exclaimed Mrs. Norton, not knowing whether to laugh or cry. "I declare, if you aren't the greatest girl! Guess you'd better open a *hotel* right off!"

But Alison persisted, and at last Mrs. Norton did allow herself the luxury of a "little cry" all "by themselves." "You see, my dear," she explained to her young friend, "so many changes! And I shall just be too proud and happy to visit you! I know it's heart meant, for I've nothing to go to Washington for—else——"

And then, certain domestic matters calling her hostess away, Alison sat down in the window of the quiet room for a few moments' reflection. Back here once again, after such a varied, anxious, wonderful experience! With all that wealth could buy, all that the deep assurance of a tried and proven love like Broderick's could give! And if my little heroine indulged in that moment in some reflections too purely sentimental to bear recording, who can say but that, in these first hours of her prosperity, they were not wholly to her credit? for she thrilled at the remembrance, rejoiced that Broderick must know it: that she had given him her heart, as he his to her keeping, when they seemed only two units in the "working classes"; and her sympathy with Molly starting away for the West with her young husband was based on the knowledge that were she and Broderick to stand thus hand in hand, with the world, their fortune, ahead of them, they would be as joyously sure of themselves as they could be this night, when her wealth seemed only a barrier to their happiness, in that it held them apart. But Alison reflected that the Broderick money,—used as she was using, and hoped still

further to use it, set the streams of life going very happily for too many people for her to pretend to despise it, and even now Hilda, coming in with a radiant look on her sweet face, added emphasis to such feelings, and the way in which she bent down to kiss her softly was better than words. Her money might make her sought for as a desirable member of a gay world, but it had not purchased these friends, and that it should be used to their advantage was, thought Alison, chief evidence of its power, its higher meaning, which, as Broderick had once told her, the "meanest bit of ore ever coined has in its seal and sign."

All elements combined to make the evening hilarious and successful. The joyousness, the fun, the gay good-humor, were all so genuine. When the Harrimans arrived, Bessie made a little rush for Alison, taking her off into a corner, to make her laugh heartily over the condition of things at home, where they were already preparing to move.

"For, you see, my dear," she said, holding Alison by both arms, as though she might be spirited away, "as nearly everything except the floor we walk on is an invention, why, things are turning into something else all the time and getting stuck when we try to pack them. Poor Dick! I wish you could have seen his face this afternoon when the baby got caught in the ottoman just as it was turning into a bookcase! I thought my offspring's back was broken, and nearly killed him at first; but when I had baby all safe and sound, I made him furious by laughing. I vow I'll not undertake to unpack the things! Oh, but you will be down there to-morrow, won't you? Things are looking finely. Dick says it 'll be no time before it's ready for use, but I live in mortal terror of his discovering

some invention to make the kalsomine play the piano! Why on earth he can't let a thing do what it's meant for, once in a while, I can't see. I asked him to-day whether he intended to train the baby into being several things or in different places at once. And what do you suppose that terrible creature answered? He was already working on a system of signals for that poor unfortunate child to be taught before it can speak! and how she was to pull them."

"And what did you say?" exclaimed Alison, laughing heartily.

"Say!" declared Bessie with an almost tragic expression. "You'd better believe I said! I told him he could go risking all our lives with the furniture and the four walls of the house even if he saw fit, but when it came to patenting the baby, no, indeed! I'd send my poor little child to the orphan asylum first; better that than the home for idiots or incurables!"

And at this point Dick Harriman, looking perfectly contented, handsome, and kindly, came up, laying one of his big hands on his wife's shoulder as he said, smiling upon them both:

"Looks first-rate, doesn't she, Miss Fane? And—oh, we're all to inspect the new quarters to-morrow. By the way, you left it to me, so I told the people to just call the building The Broderick; how's that?"

And no one understood, of course, why Alison looked at first dismayed, and then laughed gayly; but when, before she could think of sleeping, she wrote a few lines to a very impatient young man in Exeford, she mentioned this fact in telling something of the evening.

"So, you see, your name is destined to appear in connection with my efforts, be they great or small," wrote Alison.

"Therefore look to it that you keep up its fine reputation. It amuses me more than a little to see you cropping out in this way in spite of yourself when you have been such an outrageous democrat so long, and no one," she added, well aware it would torment him, "will believe for a moment you don't really rather like it. I shall not try to defend you. Have you the little 'talisman,' I wonder, within sight? I have not told you yet all it means."

And, had she but known it, the new manager of "Broderrick's" was at that moment looking at the watch-chain where he had firmly riveted her first gift,—a curiously wrought silver charm, combining a cross and an anchor,—and was thinking of many things the little emblem suggested, not least of which was how hard he would try to keep one part of it in life from the brave girl that he loved; and for the rest anchorage need only mean a peaceful, if tedious, place of waiting, since he knew that the real, fuller, deeper joys lay in God's keeping, perhaps only to be guessed at until the "day dawned and the last clouds were rolled away."

CHAPTER LV.

ALISON could hardly believe she was really in the old Mordick Street house where her grandmother's dreary life had been spent when, the next day, she stood, one of a merry, happy party, examining the work of alteration so far as it had gone; but there was no question but that it was money well spent, whether judged from a purely business or a philanthropic point of view, as the building now seemed not only habitable and home-like, but had a prosperous, cheerful air, which Alison declared "invited people to come and live happily in it." The first floor, with its once cumbrously furnished parlor and sombre dining-room, was being rapidly turned into a most approved modern flat, and in the great room in which Alison had once dressed and slept, the workmen were now busy, papering with a pretty blue and white pattern on a glossy white ground, transforming it into the parlor of flat number two, while the garden where she had gathered Broderick's "breakfast bouquet" was now the scene of much confusion in the way of rubbish, paint-pots, etc., all proclaiming that humdrum yet ever newly significant tale that we are "off with the old and on with the new," whether it be in our abodes, our toilets, or our feelings.

"Poor old place!" thought Alison, as she nodded her head to the forlorn-looking garden. "Well, you've had your day! God send prosperity with the new bricks and mortar." And then Alison went back, to find her companions in ecstasies over the kitchen cupboards and home-like conveniences.

"Tra-la-la-la! Tra-la-la-la!" sang Alison, to the music of the wedding march. "I declare, girls, it makes one feel quite like setting up housekeeping one's self, with a tabby cat and Janet Holdsworthy," and the "Oh, Miss Fane!" from the brides-elect was very expressive, and Hilda declared she expected to hear more "news than nonsense" from the Washington visit. The question of furnishing Alison had decided to take in hand herself, this being, as she had made clear, her wedding present to the "*nouveaux mariés*," but they were to select everything themselves, and I question whether in all Gotham a happier party were ever assembled than that which on the 19th of the month met to go through The Broderick, with its two floors in complete order for the families expected on the morrow, when Dr. Holton's sign would swing from the window of a specially devised office, and where he and Hilda after a brief trip would settle down, as their fair landlady observed, "to kill or cure the neighborhood."

Mrs. Robbins' opinion was found most valuable on the points of etiquette, etc., for the simple home-like festivities, and the two families were brought into contact in such a friendly fashion that what wonder "Mr. John, Jr.," as he came to be called, spent a great deal of time in Benton Place. Hilda's nervous dread lest she was burdening her young husband with an invalid wife slowly gave way under his frequent reassurances, and the fact, patent to all, that she had grown stronger every day: and, moreover, with the new co-operative plan there would be no burden of housekeeping, since she and the doctor were to be the Harrimans' boarders.

And in this fashion the days sped along, their activity all cheerful and hopeful speaking of new beginnings in the young lives curiously dear to and bound up with our

heroine's, and finally the "last" day had come, and the pleasurable, though at times tearful, excitement of the Benton Place household had reached its culminating point.

Alison was tired enough to be glad to go early to her room, but the little talk in the darkness with Hilda was restful and comforting, something they both long remembered, for they had quietly, reverently, gone over together the marriage service to be read on the morrow. Hilda, keen as was her dear friend in appreciating its simple, lofty beauty of word and meaning, knelt at Alison's side, her arm about her waist, her head on her shoulder, as they said aloud the impressive, eloquent words, pondering over each phrase, the "*till death do us part*" affecting both alike. Alison was thinking of some of the curious scenes she had gone through of late, of some households where the meaning of the sacred, solemn ceremony had so long lost its first intention, and Hilda was wondering, hoping, praying, that the death once so near, so happily averted, might wait the eternal bidding for a time long enough for her to prove what she wished, hoped, and meant to be: her husband's helpmeet, never his hindrance.

Molly, with a pair of very red eyes, owing to the last "mother talk" upstairs, looked in on her way to bed to ask Alison to be sure and have the letter she wanted Billy to take out West ready for them in the morning, and Alison found in her sentimental communings she had almost forgotten the letter to the Gray Gormans which Mr. and Mrs. Rokesmith had agreed to carry to the Windy City, whence they were to write back a full account of the Gorman *ménage*, Molly being privately instructed to find out just how they (little Alice and her husband) were situated, and to try hard to be a friend to

the poor young creature, who Alison feared must by this time be spending many a lonely hour.

And at last the all-important day had come and gone,—the quiet double ceremony, the pleasant, if a bit tearful, home celebration,—and when the Rokesmiths had driven away to the train which was to take them West, Dr. Holton and Hilda in the most sensible fashion just drove down to Mordick Street, where the Harrimans had, almost by magic, set their house in order, and where old Janet, who was beginning to be everybody's friend, had been assisting all day, and received the young couple with a motherly welcome. Hilda was decidedly not strong enough to bear the excitement of any wedding journey, and the home-coming was certainly novelty enough.

Alison felt curiously alone for a little while after the various guests had dispersed, and, discovering Mrs. Norton in the kitchen "enjoying" a good cry, she allowed herself a "little weep," as Connor called it, for company's sake; and then they both laughed at the idea of making it a "crying" business, and Mrs. Norton said it was about time they "straightened up" a little, at which work Alison assisted precisely as though housework was her favorite avocation, until Mrs. Norton, suddenly realizing what was going on, exclaimed in her downright fashion: "Well, Miss Alison, I guess *you* needn't to work like that just yet awhile"; and then, the rooms being quite orderly enough, they sat down for a little homely talk, and Mrs. Norton unfolded various of her anxieties, aspirations, and ideas to the young girl, who certainly had, both with young and old, a curious faculty of sympathetic assimilation which made it profitable to talk with her in any moment of doubt, anxiety, or fresh impetus. "Why, I'd never dream of saying all this even to Connor," said Mrs. Norton

finally. "I declare, my dear, for all that little young face of yours, you've the mind and judgment of a woman of forty."

Alison smiled. "It's easy thinking for other people," she said gently. "Heigh-ho! Mrs. Norton," she added, as they were mounting the stairs after locking up all around, "I wish I had a very wise person to think some things for me."

"Never you fret!" observed Mrs. Norton. "I guess there's one or two ready enough and waiting; only make up your own mind, my dear—don't let others do it for you. And I guess, if the truth were known, it's what you have done," the good woman added.

Under no circumstances would Mrs. Norton on such a "lonelified night," as she called it, leave her young guest and friend downstairs alone, and so, like a child of her own, Alison slept in the little room adjoining hers where Molly had for years kept her mother company, and, as Mrs. Norton with her independent phraseology remarked, it took the "edge of the emptiness" out of the house not having her eldest girl's little corner vacant, and long after the lights were out and not a sound to be heard elsewhere the two conversed through the open door, deciding finally that there must be nothing allowed to interfere with Mrs. Norton's realizing her long-cherished dream of "seeing Congress."

CHAPTER LVI.

MIDNIGHT had just pealed from the belfry of some neighboring church, and been echoed in silvery accents by the fanciful *pendule* of gilt and Dresden on the mantel of the library or book-room in Alison's Washington abode. The house was in absolute silence; the hour a rare one of solitude and quiet, happy occupation for our heroine, who, on the plea of a "headache and letters to write," had remained at home this evening while her friends and guests had departed, an indefatigable company, for a special reception at the house of the member from F——, an influential, cultivated, far-seeing sort of man, who rejoiced in abundant means to entertain well, and when he liked, exclusively, in the great city, and a married daughter who did the honors of the palatial house in a way all who were the recipients liked to remember.

Kate Egerton, Alison's pet guest just at present, had gazed in astonishment when her hostess had "cried off" for this occasion, and the Winstane girls had vainly pleaded with her not to miss what would certainly be the "event of the season," but Alison had declared she had been "doing" society at such a breakneck pace of late that a quiet evening had come to be her idea of real enjoyment, and so the others had set out, and Alison had fulfilled her own engagement with herself; had spent a delightful thinking, planning evening, going over some of Broderick's last letters, writing a few lines to him herself, thinking a little of her most recent temptation to quit the

state of single blessedness. A man of position enough to ensure her future as a social queen, of good enough personal qualities and connections to save her from the misery of unfitting companionship, and of intellectual powers sufficient to make him to her the most interesting member of her special set—if the term holds good in Washington, where every circle rounds into another—had seen fit only that very day to write, appointing the next morning for his answer; and Alison, as she gazed down into the fire before her, in the solitude of the luxurious little room, the world beyond reaching her in sounds of carriage-wheels coming and going, on the main business of social life without, knew that it was indeed the supreme test of her probation.

For it was wholly unlikely that another offer in the great social world, so entirely congenial and satisfactory, would be again laid at her feet. Looking back, she could not accuse herself of one instant's encouragement of any such intention on the part of the dozens of men, young and old, whom she was meeting constantly; rather had she obtained the reputation of either the most *exigeante* belle in Washington, or the most finished coquette, since—apparently, and in most cases, really enjoying everything about her, ready to talk with a grave and reverend signior, a fledgling among the “diplomatic corps,” a schoolboy in Congress, a busy politician or a man well known and established, like the senator in question—she had given to no one the means of saying just where her real preferences lay, and the women whom she met had almost invariably liked her; a few had made of her a friend in the great whirl and mart of feelings, interests, ideas, while her little special *coterie* was voted quite the perfection of what was charming, homelike, and refined.

Her, to say the least, peculiar visitors had aroused surprise and interest of an amused kind, until the quiet dignity with which Alison did the honors of her own home and the sights of the town itself, as well as the way in which she piloted them through a few social gatherings, silenced all criticism, and Mrs. Norton had not only seen Congress and shaken hands with the President, but, in company with young Mr. Robbins and Nora, had spent such a week under Alison's roof as will never be forgotten. No attention was neglected; no point of comfort overlooked, no amusement unthought of—and the fact that others like Kate Egerton and Agnes Leigh could be with her, made all things in her peculiar province seem well adjusted, and the channels of life and thought and feeling, even of purpose, flowed wider and deeper for this winter's experience in a city whose avenues of all kinds certainly must always make it the most important and interesting centre in the world.

“Surely,” was Alison's reflection, as the sound of wheels stopping at the door brought her happy reveries to a close, “surely, if I choose to be a home bird now, he cannot dare to gainsay me.”

And then, as the door was opened, and with the rush of cold air came the sound of voices, Alison heard the words: “Very well, in the morning then; give her my love,” and presently the portière of the library was lifted and Kitty Egerton, in all her ballroom finery, with softly sparkling eyes and something unusually happy in her expression, came into the room.

“So early!” exclaimed Alison, rising and putting away her desk and its treasures; “was that Mr. Winstane's voice? Did everyone leave so early?”

“Oh, yes; that is, I don't know,” said Kitty, looking at

Alison in a curious way. "Oh, I believe they did; he—Mr. Winstane just came to the door with me."

As she continued to look rather absent-mindedly, or with an expression of perplexity, at her hostess, Alison observed calmly:

"May I ask if anything unusual has occurred, my dear? You seem to be somewhat—well, confused."

Kitty stared another minute, letting her white burnous slide to the floor, and then said in a very small voice, and without moving her eyes from Alison's face:

"Alison, I'm engaged to be married, just about an hour ago, to Harry Winstane! Oh, what will mother say!"

And the next minute Kitty was in Alison's embrace, and as the girls kissed each other in token of mutual rejoicing, Kate drew back and looked her friend clearly, almost solemnly in the face.

"Alison," she said, with a wonderful, sweet gravity her mother would have loved to see, "you are a conjurer, but the dearest, noblest girl and friend I ever dreamed of knowing! Why is it we are all made happy, and you——"

And suddenly Kate broke off, a flood of color, a look of abject penitence in her whole face.

"O Alison!" she exclaimed, "think how selfish I am to forget the message for you! Mr. Broderick was there! He only arrived on business, he said, to-night, and met Senator Polles at dinner and went on to the party with him, expecting you would be there. He had to meet other people later, but begged me to tell you to look for him very early in the morning."

Alison's face had grown white and pink again while Kitty was speaking. She could fancy Broderick in that company; she would have given much to see him among those eager, influential, diplomatic men! And now——

"You can't think how well he looks!" pursued Kate. "He and Harry Winstane went off together. Heigho, Alison!"

"Yes." Alison was gazing down with happy eyes into the dancing fire.

"A year ago! Think how different it all is!" She came nearer to her friend, stole her arm about Alison's waist, and rested her dark head on the other's shoulder. "And, Alison, I am so happy, and once, you know, dear, I thought—well, I thought it was all up with me! *Mother* knew; the night before I came away she told me all about herself and father, you know—she thought that only some one other person on earth could ever make her a happy woman, and—well, I don't think two people in God's world were ever fitter for each other than they are."

"No, indeed, dear!"

"And mother was so dear and good! You know I pity girls that haven't any such to go to. Why, I couldn't be afraid to talk of anything to mother! I told her everything that was ever on my mind; and well, I guess she'll be pleased, anyway! Harry has written her already—before he spoke—wrote her he meant to do it, and hoped for her and father's blessing, and he'd let her know by *telegraph* what I said." Kitty laughed. "And so," she went on, "he's going to send just this despatch: 'Bill passed by a large majority Reps. Virginian and New York. WINSTANE!'"

CHAPTER LVII.

"VERY early! I wonder," thought Alison, as she moved about her special sitting-room at nine o'clock the next morning, putting little extra touches here and there to this and that, "what 'very early' means nowadays?" And five minutes later the servant's step along the passage was heard in answer to the electric bell. Alison stood very still in the centre of the beautiful, luxurious room as the steps drew near; as the portière was lifted, the servant withdrew, and she raised her eyes to look joyfully, eagerly, straight into the depths of Broderick's own!

"Ah! let me look at you," said Broderick presently, and moving back to take in a full impression of her as she stood there, her simple morning gown of gray velvet corduroy, relieved only by a bunch of fresh violets in her belt and the dull silver ornaments at her neck. "Ah, Alison! it's been such a long, lonely waiting I shall want royal bounty, a king's recompense now!"

"So you actually are tired of it?" said Alison, with a touch of her old fire, "and my lord now sees fit to say I may come home to him! Well——"

"Can it be very soon?" he said, with a quick, happy laugh. "Let me see—I'm ten deep in engagements for to-day and to-morrow among a lot of these business men, who are interested in my work; in fact," he smiled, "in Broderick & Company. When can you come home—at least to Braune House—for a visit? and then I'll insist on my terms!"

"When will you be ready?"

"I? Oh, I'll rush these people through at once. How will Thursday morning—day after to-morrow—suit you?"

"For a visit, yes. But you know I must come back and 'wind up' here! Remember, I am Dame Chatelaine."

"Exactly; but that need not take long. Now—well, I must go, I suppose!" He glanced at the clock. "But remember, it is to meet you with all arrangements made!"

But Alison had an unlooked for pleasure to enjoy before leaving the busy city. Broderick in his "ten deep" engagements met Alison two or three times in the course of the day, when she had the infinite satisfaction of seeing him made much of and certainly holding his own very well on every occasion, and when after the last place of accidental meeting he drove home with her, he had to undergo considerable teasing on the score of his social success, which he bore, retaliating by declaring once he had her safely in the Half House, which could be rebuilt, or any home with a big lock to the front door, he would pay her off by never going out from his own fireside one night in the seven.

Changes were so much the order of the day in Washington that Alison's rather abrupt departure occasioned only regrets at losing her, but slight surprise; and no one of the circle was more thoroughly satisfied with what had happened than old Janet, who declared the Lord had been more than merciful, sparing her to see such a day; and so, once more, Alison set her face toward Exeford, this time feeling that all things had indeed worked out well and wisely; sharing the happiness Kitty Egerton was fairly bubbling over with; keeping her own deep down in her heart, but shining clearly in her eyes in every glance met and answered between Broderick and herself.

The Braune House carriage was in waiting. Alison was speedily whirled along, with Jack Leigh at her side, talking in his best vein about all the different happenings since they had made their little visit to Washington. "And let me tell you, Alison," he wound up with, as he assisted her to alight, "the music school scheme is just a howling success! Everybody's daft over it, and Ogden-thorpe's hair's nearly a yard long, he's got so German over it!"

And once more the hospitable doorway was flung open, Alison was wrapped in Agnes' loving embrace, and they went away upstairs together for a brief but heart to heart talk, Alison letting Agnes be the first to share the good news with which she had once more come home.

And before the evening was over, Alison found her affairs were very nearly taken quite out of her own hands entirely. What? she was asked, delay such a wedding? Nonsense! February should leave time enough for all of what Jack impertinently called "fal-lal-ling"; declaring if *he* were Broderick he'd marry her in that gray corduroy or not at all; for it just suited her—well, dash of *diablerie*, toned it down; and so the happy, friendly talk went on and set Alison to wondering if ever bride-elect were or could be happier.

"And you see," said the effervescent Jack the next morning, "I've taken the edge off things for you very nicely. Down at the club, you know, and around a little, I've just said carelessly: 'Heard the last news from Washington?' and then I've gone on: 'Why, Broderick & Company's engaged to Miss Fane, you know; wedding coming off very soon, for he's a deal of Western business to attend to.'"

"Jack!" began Agnes, while Alison blushed crimson, "talk of *women's* gossiping! *Well!*"

"Oh, it was by far the best way; and now, my child," this to Alison, "when he comes over this afternoon don't have any nonsense, but go you straight up to him with both hands out, and say you: 'My lord, one is for February when the crocuses are out, and one for March when all the winds do blow; and which will you take, sir, for the happiest day of your—wasted life?' See?"

"Why, Jack!" whispered Agnes, laughing softly just behind him, and stealing her hand into his, "you're getting to be quite a poet! Pray, where did you learn to make love so prettily?"

"Never you mind, young woman," he answered, but it was with his arm about her waist and a little confident squeeze that he spoke the light words. "Perhaps I've got it out of books, perhaps at home."

And indeed there was no telling what had come over Jack Leigh's happy and really generous nature; and, as might be expected, "between the pair of them," as Alison called Hugh and himself, an opinion all of her own was impossible! She was waiting all alone for Broderick an hour later in the library, waiting and thinking. How wonderfully, strangely, all things in her little world had come to pass; bringing her to such a day as this, to such a serene and steadfast hope, and means of happiness for the future. Best of all was the deep, the stirring consciousness that such a choice as she and Broderick had made came from a foundation of trust and understanding, of entire sympathy, soul and heart rest, in and with each other, that defied the "slings and arrows" of the world. She stood there gazing down into the wood fire, going over every little cause and effect in their knowledge of each

other; so near him in spirit that it seemed perfectly natural to hear his voice suddenly in the doorway, saying: "Alison! Here alone!" to turn, meet his glance, his outstretched hands; and perhaps the naturalness and the deep feeling that time and tide meant so little to them, were the reason that an hour later Jack was rejoiced to hear that the day was chosen, and it would be on the 10th of March, a birthday anniversary—her mother's—dear to Alison's motherless young heart. Just at first it was cause of considerable discussion that both Alison and Broderick elected to have a perfectly quiet, simple little wedding, and by and by it transpired that all the wedding journey was to be a week or two down in Pendarley woods at the Half House, which was already in the workmen's hands under constant supervision from its new owner; for Broderick had made the purchase of the place complete, and thereby placed a sum at the banker's which insured Miss Homer a comfortable little income for her old age.

CHAPTER LVIII.

ONE clear, sunshiny afternoon in March Miss Homer stepped out of the door of the Half House with extreme consideration for its new door-sill, upon which, however, the coat of dark green paint had thoroughly dried, as it had upon all the house, which she now proceeded to survey with infinite satisfaction.

Not a bit of its original character of quaintness and simplicity had been marred in the alterations it had undergone during the past few weeks, but it certainly could lay claim now to a more complete title, with its gracefully designed wing, in which was a charming L-shaped parlor and library combined, a tiny study for its new master, a dining-room of modest dimensions, but in excellent woods and colors, and cheered by a fine open fireplace, and above, reached by a staircase worthy the name, the four commodious rooms, one of which, daintily draped in pink-and-gray chintz, might indeed, with its delicate woods and well toned walls, have deserved the name Broderick had given it of his "lady's bower," and the wide, low windows of this room overlooked a splendid stretch of hill-rimmed country, and let in the breezes of all the pine-trees about, the coolest breath of summer, the softest winds of spring or autumn; and so comfortably was the new home designed that it could easily be made warm and cosey on the winter trips Alison hoped she and the new master of Broderick & Company would often make, as Hugh declared, whenever they felt the need of a honeymoon.

Miss Homer's survey complete from that side, she passed around to the rear of the house, where in a new kitchen Janet Holdsworthy was busy admonishing a young maid-of-all-work as to her new duties and her shortcomings; and from the spicy, fragrant odors which greeted Miss Homer it could well be imagined that a supper worthy the old lady's best skill was in progress. And indeed the occasion justified such preparations, since any minute Alison and her husband might arrive; the wedding, which had been the nine days' wonderment of Exeford, having taken place that morning, quietly and simply enough, with but one demonstration—that of a very genuine and substantial holiday at the mills; the usual custom of wedding gifts, in this case, having been reversed, for a month's earnings "all around" were accredited to each account with a request it be accepted as a token of good-will and good luck to the new management.

The two brides—Alison and her friend Kate—had stood before the altar together; Kitty and her handsome young husband starting away for the South, after the wedding breakfast at Braune House, which had been Agnes' share in the general festivity. There had been papers to sign. Alison's hand had trembled a little as she wrote her new name,

"ALISON FANE BRODERICK."

If it was happiness, it had something very solemn in it to the girl, and the slight pressure of her husband's hand on her arm told that he understood what the swift look she gave him meant when she laid down the pen and moved back from the table; and then had come the half merry, half sad banquet, and "*at last!*" as Broderick whispered, they were alone together and driving rapidly through the

lovely country to their new home, both too conscious of their deep content to need or care for speech; but later on Broderick, I fancy, could have told you every time Alison moved or looked up at him, or just how the sunlight lay golden on the hill-tops, and how the thought that they were going home together felt like a prayer in his heart, like a smile upon his lips.

And then the clearing came in view. Alison, who had not as yet seen the Half House in its altered state, uttered a little cry of delight. In the evening sunshine, with all the radiance of the soft spring day about it, it was of itself a welcome to a new life, to her first home! And as they went together into the quaint, richly colored parlor, every touch an evidence of Broderick's thought of her, he smiled, showing her the logs laid ready on the hearth, and not until she had struck the match and handed it to him did Broderick, kneeling down, set the flame cheerily to a blaze, the first hearth fire they had lighted.

"It's a real home-coming if ever there was one," said Broderick, with his hands on her shoulders, as he gazed down into his wife's face. "Ah, Alison! I have earned my right to you, little girl! Am I too covetous, I wonder, now that I have you here at last for my very own! All my lonely, waiting, bachelor miseries vanished into thin air. Our watch fires lighted at last, my wife! God send them His blessing!"

And Alison's eyes and lips together spoke her "Amen."

Who could tell or picture the simple pleasure of the Half House that evening when Alison and her husband sat down to supper, Janet and Miss Homer solemnly assisting in the master's good health toast, and happiness to all; and whether they quite knew what they were eating or not mattered little, since it was all delight to face each

other across the daintily served table, and when later, as though such days were quite their ordinary routine, Alison went to the new piano and christened it with Mendelssohn's "Auf Wiedersehen," it was delicious to Broderick to sit near by, where, from the depths of his own chair, he could watch the slender, girlish figure, the white fingers on the keys, the delicately outlined profile of her uplifted face.

"God keep her fair of heart and body, mind and nature, as I have found her!" was in his heart. "It shall not be my fault if a rough wind of heaven ever touches her, now that—thank God!—she is my very own."

And this was their wedding journey into "Home-land" together.

CHAPTER LIX.

“ALL ready, Agnes? Now, my dear, am I to go down on my knees to hurry you——”

But the master of Braune House was spared such a method of appeal by the appearance of Agnes at the bend in the staircase, looking very lovely and serene as she came slowly down, drawing on her gloves, while her lord and master breathed a sigh of relief.

For, to be on time this morning was of decided importance, since the much talked of Music School of Exe-ford was to be formally opened with the dedicatory ceremonies usual on such occasions, and in the presence of as notable a company as the State could assemble. A pleasurable excitement prevailed everywhere; the October day was perfection; the holiday a general one for all hands, and every incoming train brought its quota of eager, excited, fluttering guests; the slight tinge of romance connected with the foundation of the school being sufficient to make every one anxious to see the manager of Broderick's and his young wife, about whom so many and various were the reports that, while some expected a princess royal in manner and bearing, others were sure, “from what they had heard,” she was a very crude specimen of a far Western girl—such as belongs to cheap literature and not that breezy, finely developed part of our country; and a few openly averred she was a “strong-minded,” middle-aged woman who had captured her good-looking young husband by a clever *ruse*—posing for the

heroic! However, to-day would settle the question of externals.

"Where are the Brodericks?" Agnes asked as she entered the carriage. "I know they were not quite sure last night——"

"Oh, Broderick had all those Albanians to see," said Jack lightly. "Winstane's friends, you know. Alison was to meet us at the Hall——"

And so it proved; when a little later the master of Braune House and his wife entered the Music Hall by its specially reserved door, Alison was the first to greet them as she came forward, smiling in her delight and looking very pretty in her quiet costume of dark brown; the little bonnet of yellowish straw with its bordering of seal-hued velvet having a touch of color in the crimson chrysanthemums that trimmed it effectively, while the bouquet of natural flowers in her belt was of Braune House roses.

"So! Here we are again!" said Jack, grasping her hand cordially. "Well, young lady; is it true you are to make a speech?"

"Of course! so like me!" said Alison gayly. "Take care! Remember your powers of oratory are to be tested."

"Yes, and Agnes Mary Leigh, listen! If you *dare* look at me with that peculiar glittering gaze of yours I shall be—well——"

"I won't dare raise my eyes. I'll just listen, Jack; only don't——"

"Now see here!" exclaimed Jack. "Alison, Broderick, I appeal to you! If she's given me one 'don't,' she has fifty! I'm not generally accounted a nervous man; but to have your better half, for example, wake you up in the dead of night to say: 'Jack, dear, I hate to disturb you—

are you awake, Jack?—but really, when you make your address, try not to stand too much on the left foot'; or, it may be, 'keep your right thumb well in your buttonhole up to thirdly——' Is that, I ask, inspiring?"

"Alison, let us leave him to his fate! He's getting worse the longer he lives!" exclaimed Agnes, trying to look severe.

"Is my hair—his hair—mein Herr here yet?" demanded Jack; "the great untonsorialated one."

"Ogdenthorpe? Oh, half an hour ago! Agnes, dear, our wish has come true, hasn't it? All the music in us can find a vent!"

And Alison's look, exchanged with one from her friend's dark eyes, expressed what both were feeling as they made their way around to the box reserved for them and two or three local dignitaries, whence the hall which formed the centre of the building could be viewed to perfection. Its seating capacity, if not on a scale of great dimensions, was admirably managed, and likely to prove ample for the concerts to be given by members and pupils weekly during the coming year, while everything was in such good taste that the fresh paint, gilding, and such upholstery as it included did not present the crude effect of newness such decorations are apt to have, while flowers were in profusion, the air rich with their perfume, the autumn-colored woodlands having sent in their contributions in royal measure.

Alison, who knew well that it was with his working friends her husband's interest lay chiefly on this occasion, looked about at once for certain mill faces in the rapidly gathering audience, and was quickly employed bowing right and left to old friends, some of whom, like Jake Marks and his wife Jenny, stood up in their anxiety to see

and be seen by her, nodding demonstratively, waving programmes, etc. Then the distinguished guests absorbed her attention, and she and Agnes found their time well occupied for the rest of the morning.

And whatever the "glitter" of Agnes' gaze, Jack Leigh certainly acquitted himself admirably; and yet it was but natural that Broderick should receive the most unstinted round upon round of applause when he made his address, for well they knew prosperity and the home happiness he had found had not in the smallest degree made him less the toiler's friend and partner. He alluded briefly to the "happy combination of circumstances which had led to the building of the new music school" (great applause), the "fine era of prosperity for the mills which the autumn promised," and went on to express a hope that, with the immense dormant talent of the sister towns, they should become as famous for their music as their handicraft, and show the world beyond that not only in the hum of their looms was their power of evoking music, whose echoes would reach down through the halls of time, telling a story of happy hearts and busy lives, of talents not buried but brought to their fulfilment, and after a slight rhetorical flourish of patriotism, with which no speaker on any Exeford or Exetown platform would dare to leave his audience, Broderick moved back, and the orchestra crashed forth in the strains of "Hail, Columbia!"

It was over at last; most successfully, as all conceded! The exit was in such a crowd as the town had never known! Such laughing and talking, such efforts at handshakings and embracings, such eagerness to exchange opinions, criticisms, etc! Then at last Alison's eager eye caught Broderick's away at the end of the lobby, where he was telegraphing a reassuring glance, and a few

moments later our friends were all whirling away to Braune House and Agnes' luxurious luncheon party.

Alison had but a moment apart with her husband before the company engrossed them, but she contrived to say, with her little nod of the head: "Not so bad a speech—for a mere workingman!"

And Broderick's answer was characteristic: "I never before felt so grateful that I belong to the working classes! The sense of unity with and for them was my keynote! Did it strike home?"

"Every time! O Hugh, I really thought you looked—well, quite good looking standing up there in that easy, independent way of yours. I murmured a little brava all to myself! A *hip-hip*, don't you know?"

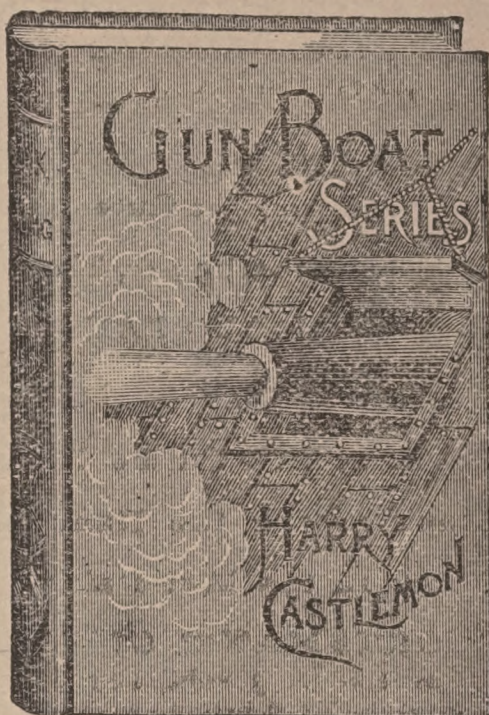
"Broderick!" came from the corner of the main hall, where they were all congregated, "stop flirting with your wife, and come over here and show Mr. Corbett how we're going to put those pivots into the Clyde."

"Horrid men! they can't forget shop!" exclaimed Agnes, drawing nearer to Alison. "Well, we will have a general rendezvous to-night, I suppose, Alison, my child. The Egertons, Winstanes, everybody. How happy Celia Kane was and is! Think of her being librarian to the new school! Well, it is a great work accomplished. I hope it will go on successfully. Jack says—and you know he sometimes is wonderfully observant—we must expect various ups and downs and trials and defeats, but, as he also says, the foundation is a very secure and well laid one, and it is for the greatest good to the greatest number. Miss Homer declares she has 'lived her day out' in seeing this accomplished, and I verily believe it comes next to the meeting house in her mind as a place of worship."

“Because,” said Alison, “it leads us away from ourselves. Do you remember the night we quoted Shakspeare, Agnes, my dear?—the harmony of celestial souls! When we are dumb, let music speak for us! It seems to reach far out, and meet what we—dream of!”

THE END.

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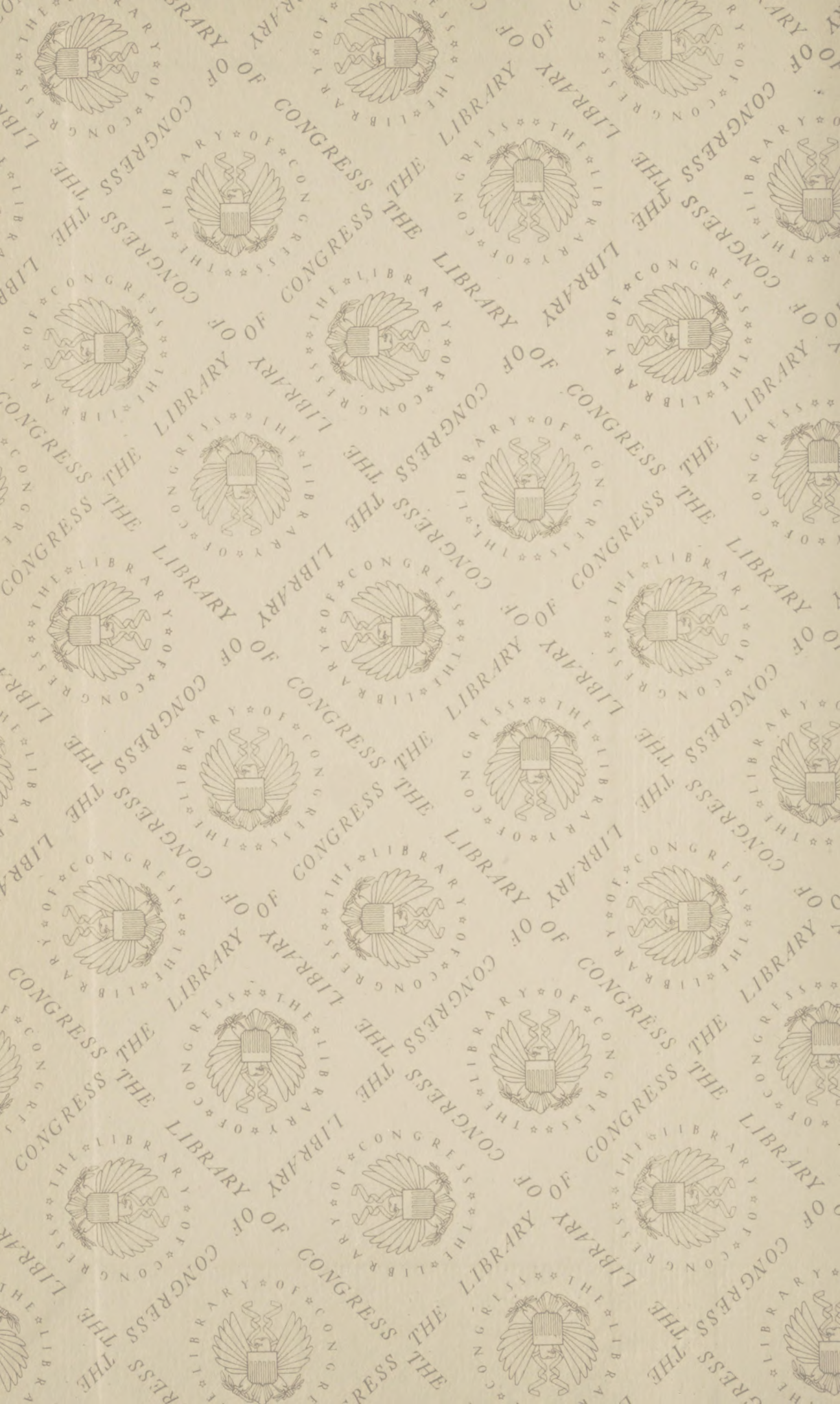
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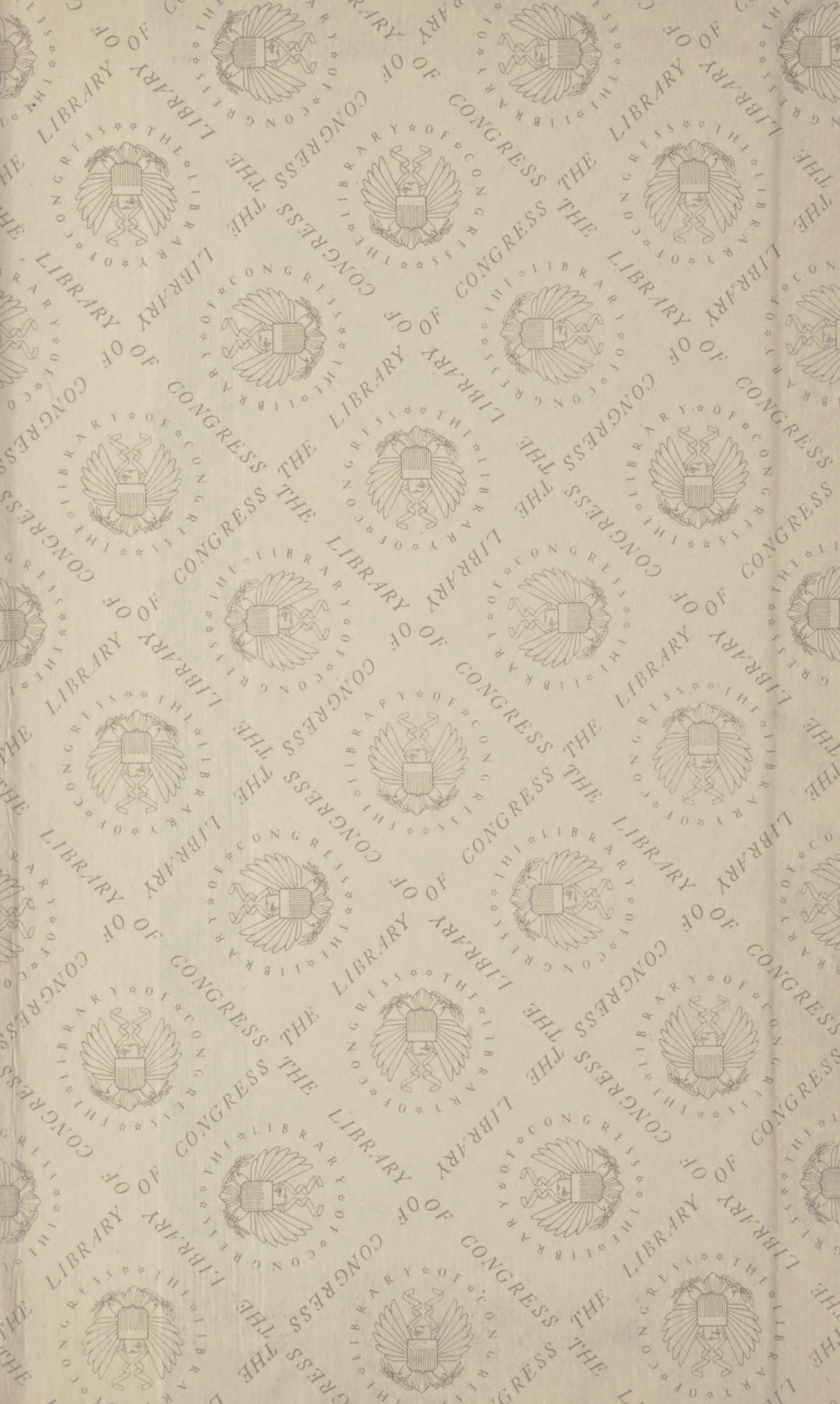
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